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by THOMAS N. SCORTIA

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35¢
Volume 8
Number 2
September, 1957

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SCIENCE FICTION STORIES, September, 1957, published bi-monthly by COLUMBIA PUBLICATIONS, INC., 1 Appleton Street, Holyoke, Mass. Editorial and executive offices at 241 Church Street, New York 13, New York. Entered as second class matter at the Post Office at Holyoke Mass., under the act of March 3, 1879. Entire contents copyright 1957 by Columbia Publications, Inc. 35c per copy; yearly subscriptions $2.10. Printed in the U. S. A.

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THE RETURN FROM TROY

by Russ Winterbotham

illustrated by FREAS

Who but an antiquarian like Fernando Einhardt would come up with the idea that his ward should have two suitors, instead of one, and that the best man should win her?

WILHELM EMORY, the bard of New Haven, wrote in the 81st Century: "To be, never not to be, that is the future. For whilst it lies not within the powers of man to foretell what may happen tomorrow, all men can say with certainty that, whether or no the human race is here to receive it, there will be a 100th Century."

And now it was here. In some ways disappointing; in others everything that was anticipated. The blondes were more yummy; the brunettes more luscious, the redheads more invigorating. Man was healthier and sturdier, more broad of brow and beam. His internal organs had adjusted themselves to his walking upright instead of on all fours.

But the greatest legacy of the human race was the wealth of ideas and gadgets, the heritage of a million years of thinking that were on hand to permit man to arrive, to live and to depart from the earth with greater ease.

Yet in spite of these things, man was his natural self.

He did not realize it, and playing the sage, Fernando Einhardt—perky and sturdy in spite of his white hair—sought to improve his granddaughter's chances for happiness by guiding the footsteps of the man who had asked for her hand.

It began on a bright day

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Janna sent the young man flying . . .

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in May, the year 10,001, in the home where the orphaned girl Janna lived in the care of old Fernando. The house was two centuries old, made of durable materials both above and below the ground.

Deep beneath the surface, in a restored old bombshelter, which may have dated back to the ancient atomic wars, Fernando indulged his hobbies, which all dealt with manners and customs of antiquity.

Fernando today was spinning a top, just as schoolboys had spun tops in the springtime for thousands of years. In one corner of the room, its magnesium frame glinting in the soft glow of the sunlamps, stood a machine of antiquity, an ancient mechanical brain. Fernando had made the machine with his own hands, constructing it on a pattern handed down since the 23rd Century.

HE MIGHT have bought a pocket-sized electronic device at any department store, but Fernando was an antiquarian. Besides, the modern mechanical brains were equipped with human complexes and desires, and Fernando considered them unreliable. Fernando was interested only in the physical, mathematical qualities of the universe.

And today, when Vince Canes asked Fernando for Janna's hand, the old man considered mathematical probabilities, rather than wraith-like biological predestination.

"It was an ancient custom, lad, that a man must win his bride, even fight for her. What in the hell have you ever done along that line?"

"I kissed her once, and believe me, sir, it wasn't easy. She's been studying wrestling at night school."

"Janna is an innocent child. She knows nothing of man's coarse ways. You are the only boy friend she ever had."

"Perhaps I'm all she ever wanted," said Vince; "she picked my card out of thousands at the Bureau of Genes and Chromosomes, and invited me over to play chess."

"Were you the only one she could find who was biologically suited?"—Fernando set the top in motion, and the electric eye of the mechanical brain focussed upon it.

"I like to tell myself that she liked my picture," said Vince. He hesitated and looked troubled. "Of course, my card *might* have been on top, among the C's, you know. But I hope it was because of my curly hair, and my profile, and my athletic body. You can hardly call me the tag-end of the human race, sir."

"INDEED I do not," agreed Fernando, examining the youth with his eyes. The young man wore shorts and a tight-fitting collarless shirt. The muscles seemed

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molded into his clothing. Even without his thick-lensed glasses, Fernando could see that Vince was made of swoon stuff. "Be that as it may, I believe a young man should win his bride, by fair means or foul—just as they did in early times."

"Well, why not?" Vince laughed agreeably. He was convinced that he had a start on any competition that might be brought into his pursuit of the lovely Janna at this late hour.

"That is real sporting of you, son," said Fernando. "I'll find a candidate. After you've won her, you love will be deeper."

Fernando reached down and picked up the top, squeezing it to a stop with a calloused hand. "Do you think I'm too old to play with a peg top?"

"Well—er—after all it's a child's toy."

"Not a mere toy," Fernando said, examining the top. "An ancient and honorable relic. The oldest, or one of the older things that man has used for his entertainment. It certainly antedates crossword puzzles. Some of the earliest works mention it—or at least my classical dictionary of antiquity tells me so."

Vince smiled. "I did not wish to depreciate your hobby, sir. Everyone knows your enthusiasm for digging into the past. In fact that is a failing of mine, too. We'll spend many weary hours together after Janna and I are married. It's possible we might unlock the secrets of the 20th Century."

"That indeed would be an accomplishment," said Fernando. "However, this spinning top is a scientific experiment—more accurately, a simple problem." He trotted over to the machine and punched the controls. The machine chattered and rumbled. From an ancient sound track, which Fernando had rewired so that it spoke the modern Nglisi tongue that all Earthmen used, came a voice: "A complex problem, not incapable of solution."

Fernando looked proud as he glanced at Vince. "You see? It is helping me learn things. Of course what I learn is not the slightest use; but I'm learning things, anyhow." He turned to the machine and spoke clearly into a microphone. "Select a point in space outside our galaxy."

THE MACHINE clicked. "South of the Magellanic Cloud."

"All right," Fernando went on. "Now describe the absolute motion of the top, in terms of the Galactic movement and rotation, the solar orbit within the galaxy, the earth's orbit and rotation, and the spinning of the top itself, not forgetting the precessional motion of the top's axis

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from maximum to minimum."

The machine clicked twelve times. "Shall I include the precessional motion of the earth?"

"Well, the factor will not amount to much, but we want accuracy above everything. Yes, include it. Carry each factor to the twelfth decimal."

"Shall I prepare a graph?"

"Goodness no! There's not enough paper in the house for that. Just give me the mathematics."

The machine clicked twice more. A bell rang, and then the motors hummed and lights flashed. Fernando turned to Vince. "Interesting, isn't it?"

"Forgive me for saying so, sir, but it seems like a waste of time."

"Hah! You think a man of my age does not have time to waste. Believe me, boy, the only precious time *is* the time we waste. At least it is the time we enjoy most; procrastination delights the heart and clears the mind."

Vince frowned a little and seemed, after a moment, to decide that it wasn't worth worrying about. "When shall I meet my rival, sir?"

"First, I must select him," said Fernando, "I'll let you know."

LEAVING the mechanical brain to solve the problem of the spinning top, Fernando rode up in the elevator with Vince. After letting the young man out the front door, the white-haired man went through the house to find his grand-daughter.

Janna was in the hydroponic gardens admiring the flowers and greenery that hung from the marble tanks.

"Vince Canes has told me that he wishes to marry you, dear," Fernando told her.

"I do not think he lied, grandpop. His behavior toward me is quite Freudian, only two weeks ago, he kissed me. I could have prevented it with a flying mare, but I hated to muss up his beautiful hair."

"Do you think he would be a fitting mate?"

Janna studied an orchid-rose artificial hybrid. She was dark, with deep brown eyes. Her high cheek bones gave her an etherial look, and her figure held a symphonic grace.

"He is earnest, determined and ambitious. I'm sure he'll be a success in any line of work he undertakes. He has a serious mind and a magnificent brain. I am told that he speaks several ancient languages—including Glisnig, the language of the 50th Century from which our own language evolved. He intends to study that atrocious dead language, English someday. Not more than a dozen men in the world can speak it."

"But he doesn't have a job?"

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"He is busy at the National Archives, studying. How can a man choose a career until he knows what he is best fitted for?"

"SMALL MATTER," said Fernando. "He can help me waste time till he finds something. I understand he's quite wealthy, and can support you in the manner in which you are accustomed, whether he works or not?"

"Isn't everybody rich?"

"Not everyone, child. Only five years ago, they gave the Nobel prize to a man for being poor, the first real case of poverty in 50 years. Perhaps Vince could lose all his money and become another national hero."

"I don't think I would like that, grandpop. You have to be so terribly good. Not that I want to be sinful, but it's nice to know you can afford it if you want to be."

"Do you love him, dear?"

Janna frowned. "What a strange thing to ask! Don't you think emotions are rather absurd, grandpop? I suppose in time I'll feel emotionally attached to Vince; but it is much wiser to let the sorting machine at the Bureau of Genes and Chromosomes select one's husband."

"I want you to be happy," said Fernando, "In ancient times, love was quite important in selecting a mate; men even fought each other for a woman's favor. I was hoping that you might honor the custom and forget about the standards of the Bureau."

"Of course, grandpop. If it will make you any happier, I'll see a psychiatrist and have him wind me up in some inhibitions and emotions and so on, so I will fall in love with Vince."

"That's not necessary. I believe if you would tolerate a rival for a few weeks, that you might make a choice between two men. You'd broaden your outlook if you shopped around a little, instead of marrying the first man you met without examining others."

Janna smiled sweetly and nodded her head. "You and your crazy ideas. But it sounds like fun. Who will be Vince's rival?"

"Let's do it up right," Fernando replied. "We'll let fate decide it. Let's stand in front of the house and stop the first nice-looking man that walks down the street."

ALEK WEED had just returned from an expedition to the stars. Earth looked good to him. Man was tailored for Earth, and that must be the reason Earth always looked better than anyplace else, he decided. There were other planets like Earth, but none that were identical. There was always something—

And Alek had his eyes on a black haired, brown-eyed

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woman who was waving at him from across the street. She was standing on the steps of an old mansion; beside her was a white-haired old man who was smiling and bobbing his head.

"Greetings, young man," said the old fellow. "I'm Fernando Einhardt and this is my grand-daughter Janna. We need a third at chess. Would you care to stop in for a moment?"

"A third at chess?"

"Grandpop and I always play our best when someone is watching," said Janna.

Alek thought privately that chess was tedious, especially for a third party. But it would not be tedious watching such a beautiful young woman.

"I should love to be your kibitzer," he said. "In fact, such a pastime could become a hobby."

THE NEXT day, two problems had been solved. Fernando's mechanical brain turned in complete mathematical equations on the spinning top, and Fernando had a rival set up for Vince Cane's suit for his grand-daughter's hand.

He called Vince on the vidiphone and invited him to meet his rival. Then he sent to a caterer and ordered a dinner of synthetic foods that would have confounded the dieticians.

"There is an ancient saying that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach," said Fernando. "Tonight we mean to find out whether it is an aphorism of Freud or of an idiot."

Although neither Vince nor Alek made any amatory gestures—such as tossing kisses at Janna—at the table, it could easily be seen that they enjoyed themselves.

"Never before have I eaten like this," said Alek. "Pray tell me what the exotic flavor was in the main dish?"

"It is a food known in antiquity as Spam," said Fernando. "I learned about it in reading old works."

Alek laughed. "I know little about antiquity, and I care little where things came from. What matters most to me is that they're here."

Vince smirked, thinking that his new rival was already cutting his own throat. "When Janna and I are married, we'll eat good old concentrated food pills. It saves a lot of time."

Alek raised his eyebrows. "You did not tell me you were engaged, Janna."

"Not actually," Fernando put in quickly. "It is my idea that Vince must win her. And, my dear Alek, I hope you will forgive our subterfuge in pretending to ask you to play chess with us. I had decided that, in order to make Vince prove his worth, there must be a rival. You looked like a good candidate."

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"Indeed?" Alek's face brightened. "I feel highly honored. I hope I can really test Vince's metal. And may the best man win."

"Naturally," said Vince. "The best man always wins."

"Of course," Alek agreed. "How long must I play the part of rival?"

"That depends on a number of things," said Fernando. "As you know, it is an age-old custom for the bride to make the wedding plans. I assume, therefore, that it will be up to Janna to establish the length of the contest for her heart."

JANNA SHOOK her head. "I can't decide tonight. Besides, it would not be fair to Alek not to give him plenty of opportunity to test Vince."

Alek smiled more broadly. "That will give you time also to plan an elaborate wedding ceremony."

"Ceremony?" Janna's brow puckered. "There is no ceremony to the signing of a wedding contract."

Alek looked at Fernando. "I thought, sir, with your knowledge and interest in antiquity, that you might be planning one of those ancient weddings—with bridesmaids, maids of honor, flower girls, page boys, best men, ushers and all of that?"

It was Fernando's turn to look thoughtful. "For a man who takes no interest in antiquity it is a highly worthy idea. You know, Janna dear, those barbaric rites might have been a good thing after all. It impressed young couples with responsibility, made the marriage seem more than a legal agreement."

"Pure ostentatiousness," said Vince.

"Not in the least. It was a beautiful event for a beautiful girl."

"Of course," Vince added hastily, feeling that he might have said the wrong thing when he disagreed, "if Janna wants something of that sort, I'll go through with it."

"Alek could be best man," said Fernando.

"*I* shall be best man," declared Vince, rather indignantly. "Janna will have nothing less than the best for her husband."

"It simply means best friend of the bridegroom."

"WE'LL HAVE the most gorgeous ceremony," Janna said enthusiastically. "We'll use the most thrilling ritual we can find."

"We have many centuries to choose from," said Alek. "I'm sure we'll overlook nothing to give you the best. Both Vince and I will work on it."

"The difficulty," Fernando pointed out, "is language. When you go back beyond the 50th Century, most of the documents are in English, French, German and all of those other dead tongues."

"Perhaps we can find trans-

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lations," Vince suggested. "I'm sure the National Archives has facsimiles of translations."

"Of course; many oldtime classics have been translated into Glisnig. Vince is quite fluent in that tongue."

"Shakespeare has even been translated into Nglisi," Janna said. "I once read a story that he wrote—*Romeo and Juliet*. It seems that it was a love story, although I don't believe we'd like the ceremony they had, both Romeo and Juliet died from it."

"Yes, a suicidal ceremony is out. I'm sure there are better ones," said Vince quickly. "I'll check in the Archives tomorrow."

QUITE EARLY the next day Alek appeared at the National Archives. He had the sorter go through the cards and he selected a truckload of books, which he had carted away. Then, smiling quietly to himself, he waited until Vince appeared at the files, in search of something dealing with ancient marriage rites.

Vince seemed surprised to see Alek. "I thought you were my rival. Should a rival assist a rival plan his wedding ceremony?"

"It may be *my* ceremony."

"Don't live in a dream world. But if you're here, perhaps you can assist me. Have you any ideas?"

"It just happens that I have," said Alek. "I read a great deal when I traveled in space, and once I ran across a reference to a volume entitled *"Iliad and Odyssey"*, by a man named Homer something-or-other—I never did get his last name. From the title, I suppose it was something like the *"Romeo and Juliet"* that our wonderful Janna has read."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, it was about the most beautiful woman in the world, and her marriage. Her face was supposed to launch a thousand ships."

Vince pondered. "I do not understand how a woman could launch an interplanetary voyage with her face. Perhaps they did it with electronics."

He turned to the files and quickly found the volume by its title: *"Iliad and Odyssey"*, *by Homer*. "It must be a very old book. There's no date of first publication."

He studied the cards. "There are no modern Nglisi translations, but there are a thousand in English and Glisnig."

He took the cards to a librarian. She studied them and punched buttons. An hour later she reported: "All of the volumes you ask for have been checked out."

"Now what do you know about that!"

"This fellow Homer must be a popular writer," Alek declared.

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"We have a few facsimilies of the original text," said the Librarian. "However, they are written in Grik; I doubt if anyone in the world speaks Grik."

"Give me the book," declared Vince. "If there is any way to read it, I'll find it."

"Attaboy," said Alek, "love will find a way."

THE BOOK was written with characters that did not even look like the alphabet, except vaguely. "Bad type," said Vince,

"No," said the librarian. "Dead language. Grik has not been spoken since—well, way back in history."

"The language must be nearly as old as English!"

"Possibly two or three centuries older. This particular volume hasn't been checked out since the 69th Century."

Vince took the book home with him. A beauiful love story, that told of a woman launching a thousand ships into space, would certainly tell of a ceremony honoring such a lovely woman as Janna.

The next day he visited Janna and found her playing chess with Alek. He told her of his find. "I'm going to translate it all by myself," Vince said. "That will be my way of winning you."

"But Vince, dear," said Janna. "Life is short. It may take a year or two to learn Grik and translate this love story of Iliad and Odyssey. Let's try something easier."

"My dear girl," said Alek, "would you allow yourself to be won by anything less than the best effort? Indeed, you should not hold yourself so cheaply."

Janna did not seem to like the price, but she nodded. "All right, Vince, but hurry."

"I love a man with determination," said Alek.

A month later Alek brought all his translations in for renewal. There had been no further calls for them, so the request was granted. Vince was so busily engaged learning Grik that he had forgotten that there were translations.

VINCE LEARNED that there were 24 letters in the Grik alphabet. A few of them had a remote similarity to letters he knew, but others bore not the slightest resemblance.

Frequently Alek dropped in to see him and learn how he was getting along. Alek always praised his rival highly. "Janna should be proud of you, Vince. You are really proving yourself worthy of her by learning a language that has been dead for nearly a hundred centuries."

"I'm not learning it very fast," Vince admitted.

"Do not falter in your determination. I'll keep Janna from growing lonesome, and pining away for you."

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"You are indeed the best friend a bridegroom ever had," said Vince.

Another month passed, and Vince emerged from his home carrying the ancient book under his arm. He had managed to learn that one or two letters were vowels, and that others were consonants, but he had not yet learned any Grik words. However, he was faltering. He had decided not to rely wholly upon his brain, but he would use Fernando's mechanical brain. A machine that could plot the absolute motion of a spinning top, certainly could translate a language.

Fernando received the suitor cordially. Vince briefly stated his trouble.

"Twenty-four letters, hey?" Fernando's white head bobbed. "Well, you've learned something. Takes a child several years to learn there are 32 in our modern alphabet."

"Actually only 26, sir," said Vince "you foget that the umlaut characters and special vowels in Nglisi were really modified from other letters to assist in phonetic reading."

"Hmm, if they did that in Grik, you wouldn't have much left. Looks to me as if you'll spend most of your life translating that book."

"Please, sir, can I have assistance from your mechanical brain?"

FERNANDO looked sternly at Vince. "Son, it wouldn't be fair. The old custom was for the man to win the girl by his own brains and brawn; if I let you use my electronic brain, you wouldn't deserve my grand-daughter's hand in marriage."

Vince went back home, carrying his book under his arm. It had been a long time since he'd seen Janna, he hoped she was bearing up.

Suddenly, he remembered the translations. He went to the library and found them all gone. Somewhere in the city were a thousand books telling the secret he wanted to know and he could not lay hands on them. The librarian refused steadfastly to tell him who had the books.

If there was only one book available that told the story of lovely Iliad and her lover Odyssey! There must be! Alek had told of a reference to the work that he had read; perhaps the story was told elsewhere. Perhaps in some encyclopedia or classical dictionary. Then he realized that he knew where there was a classical dictionary. Old Fernando had one; he often mentioned it. It told about everything. Surely it would contain a reference to a love story so important that it had been translated into English and Glisnig. That night, Vince went to the authorities and purchased a burglar's license.

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He waited till a late hour, then went to old Fernando's home. He climbed the back wall, found himself in the hydroponic gardens, and hesitated as he heard the sound of voices.

On a bench in the moonlight he made out the figures of Janna and Alek, talking in low and confidential tones.

"Lover, dear," said Janna. "Was there ever a love like ours?"

"Never," said Alek. "It outshines Romeo and Juliet, and that of all the lovers of history. You are more beautiful even than Helen of Troy, whose face launched a thousand ships!"

The idiot, thought Vince, *he d o e s not k n o w who launched a thousand ships with her face. It was Iliad, not Helen.*

"The phrase is familiar," said Janna. "Isn't that part of that horrible love story that Vince has been translating to win me?"

"Indeed it is," said Alek. "I've been reading a translation."

VINCE crept back over the wall. This was the wrong house for burglary. Alek had a translation! Hastily he sped by helicopter to Alek's home. Stacked there in every room were huge piles of translations of *"Iliad and Odyssey"*. And one copy was in Nglisi!

Vince picked up the book and read. It was indeed a love story, about a woman named Helen, who was kidnapped. There was a long war, a siege of a city called Troy, in an effort to rescue her. Many men died, including a brave warrior name Achilles, and finally the city was destroyed. But there was no description of a marriage ceremony, unless the w o o d e n horse had something to do with it.

The story told of Odysseus, and how he returned from Troy to find his wife Penelope besieged—as Troy had been—by lovers; but Odysseus had destroyed them all. Vince was determined to destroy the single lover who was taking advantage of his absence by wooing Janna.

In anger, Vince strode to the police station to buy a license to commit m u r d e r. However, these licenses were only sold during the open season, and were not available now.

HE EXPLAINED his predicament. "Well, the Unwritten Law was written in the 81st Century," said the officer. "If you were married, you'd be entitled to one shot at your wife's lover."

"But I'm not married."

"Is your wife married to this guy?"

"No." Vince s u d d e n l y smiled. "If he was married,

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and I made love to his wife, he could shoot at me?"

"Just once."

"Could I shoot back in self defense?"

"Once."

Vince ran back to the darkened house of Old Fernando. Alek was holding Janna in his arms and she had seemingly forgotten all she knew about wrestling.

"You must marry her" said Vince.

"By Trojan rites?" Alek asked.

"By any rites; I want to make love to her."

"I don't want you to make love to me," said Janna. "I like you only for your intellectual qualities."

"Do you love Alek for his?"

"Of course not; I just love him."

"Then you mustn't marry him. You're my betrothed."

There was a footstep behind Vince, and a voice cried out: "She *will* marry Alek, or else."

Vince swung around, and saw white-haired Fernando standing in the doorway. In his hands he held a strange-looking instrument.

"Grandpop," asked Janna, "what is that thing you're holding in your arms."

"Part of an old-fashioned marriage rite sweetheart. It's called a shotgun."

Vince sighed and went away. He stopped off at Alek's home and read the rest of the book. It said that Helen made a mighty fine wife after she was brought back from Troy. She married somebody name Stanislaus, or Menelaus, or something.

The trouble was Janna was not Helen of Troy. She was Penelope. And somehow, Vince was no Odysseus; it wasn't open season on lovers.

★

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GENIUS LOCI

Novel of Alien Mystery

by Thomas N. Scortia

Out in the cornfield, he saw a flash of white as the strange woman appeared again . . .

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★ GENIUS LOCI ★

by Thomas N. Scortia

Whoever heard of a plant blight that affected people? Well, they had it in this frontier colony of New Glendale, and Alfred Cadis was expected to track it down. But that was only a minor mystery—a major one was the matter of things freezing, when the temperature never fell below 60 degrees Farenheit!

illustrated by ORBAN

"I SHOULD warn you about New Glendale," the Colonial Administrator said.

Alfred Edward Cadis rubbed his hands together nervously, inspected the weave in the skirt of his tunic where it lay in silken folds over his knees, and blinked near-sightedly. "Warn?" he said, blinking rapidly.

"Well, not exactly warn," the Administrator said. "Perhaps, 'prepare you for' would have been a better choice of phrase."

He should have known there would be a catch to it, Cadis thought with a sinking sensation. Why was it he always caught the dirty assignments that no one else would touch with a tractor beam?

When Tobita, the little chief of the Agronomy Section, had suggested that he might enjoy a jaunt out to the periphery, Cadis should have known that it meant only trouble. If he had only stood up to the man, asserted his seniority...

He pictured himself towering over the tiny Oriental (as indeed he did physically) and demanding his rights as the senior unrated member of the staff. The thought of opposing the insinuating paternalism of Tobita's authority was frightening, but pleasant when...

"...nothing really to be alarmed about," the Administrator was saying. "It's just that they're a bit odd, even for a stage I settlement."

"Well," Cadis said timidly, "they really can't be too bad. After all they did come from

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California originally, and they're an English-speaking group."

"Have you ever been to California?"

"Well," Cadis admitted, "California *is* quite a distance from Boston but..."

What, he wondered, was wrong with the Administrator? He saw nothing particularly humorous in his remarks.

THE ADMINISTRATOR began to riffle through the papers in the personnel file before him, trying to hide his strange amusement the while. "Um, I see you're not married."

"No," Cadis said, half belligerently.

"That could prove awkward."

"I can't see how."

"Well, no matter. You've undoubtedly coped successfully with the problem for forty-two years."

"Thirty-eight," Cadis amended hesitantly.

"The records say...well, they *could* be in error. Anyway they need you pretty badly out in New Glendale. They're trying to establish a pork-corn agricultural economy and their corn has developed some kind of blight."

"Pork—corn economy? Surely, you can't be serious. In this day and age?"

"I told you they were a bit odd. The point is, if the current corn crop fails, the group will have to abandon the planet and that means we'll have to start all over again. I need hardly tell you how difficult it is to find groups willing to colonize a new world."

HE FUMBLED in a drawer of his desk and handed Cadis a bound set of microcards, ruffling them metallically first and counting them. "These will give you a general rundown on New Glendale's geography, soil characteristics, atmosphere and the like. The routine data your section members always get before a field assignment. The settlement has a complete lab with self-contained power source. You won't need anything but your basic equipment."

The Administrator consulted his manicured nails. "I've arranged space for you on a quartermaster ship leaving for Gleep tomorrow."

"Gleep?" Cadis said. "But that's in the opposite direction."

"There's no direct connection," the Administrator said. "New Glendale is somewhat difficult to reach."

THREE THINGS Alfred Edward Cadis disliked in a man: an air of competence, physical beauty, and any other quality that made him feel ineffectual.

He disliked the pilot of the QM ship instantly.

The pilot fulfilled the third

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requirement nicely by being self-confidently in his late twenties. Cadis spent the three days to planetfall on Gleep reading the data on New Glendale and rereading one of the several taped twentieth century romances which he'd brought from his private library. "*Jon Carpenter and the Torturer of Mars*" he'd found long ago to be an effective antidote to extended exposure to competent bustling young men. Part of his addiction to that imaginary series, he supposed, was due to his mother's disapproval of them.

"Alby," she would say in her shrill ragged voice while he winced at the too-precious contraction of his first name, "Alby, you'll warp your mind with that trash."

Up until her death when he was thirty-four, he'd read them surreptitiously in the secrecy of his room. Jon Carpenter's adventures with the Green Princess of Varoom had been an escape from the deadening dullness of life that closed in about him. Even now the stories still had the pleasure of a vice, secretly enjoyed.

His first three days on Gleep passed rather pleasantly with Jon Carpenter, even though he found himself billeted with three young spacemen of the Survey Service, who sat up far into the night playing poker and either arguing politics or trading outrageously unbelieveable stories of their experiences with certain women of the local settlement. Cadis was annoyed at times to find himself seriously wondering if a man might be physically capable of some of the feats boasted.

THE YOUNG men left four days after he arrived, and a week after that two members of the QM service moved in. These remained five days. At two days lacking a month, Cadis decided he'd better check on passage to New Glendale.

"New Glendale?" the Gleep Port One Routing Officer said: "Where's that?"

Cadis told him.

"You've gone in the wrong direction."

"I'm told there's no direct connection."

"Well, we'll just ship you on to Land's End. Maybe they can help you out."

"But I want to go to New Glendale," he protested.

"Mister, I'm a busy man," the Routing Officer said.

A week later Cadis made planetfall on Land's End.

"Well, it's about time," the Land's End Routing Officer said. "How did you come, by pneumotube?"

"But..."

"Never mind. Captain L'Heureux's been waiting for you for two weeks, cluttering up my number nine pit with that smelly tub of his."

"Well, I'd like to get a

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shower and 'fresher first," Cadis said. "I haven't had one since..."

"Mister," the Routing Officer growled, "I'm getting mighty impatient about that number nine pit."

Fifteen minutes later Cadis walked up the ramp to the *Squalus* out of New Glendale.

CAPTAIN L'HEUREUX looked as rusty as his ship. The rusty appearance stemmed chiefly from the reddish-yellow stains that discolored his matted grey chin-whiskers. He was wearing a greasy chief's helmet, set askew on thick ragged hair and...for a moment Cadis couldn't believe his eyes ...a buckskin shirt and trousers.

"Humph," the Captain said, eying his tall lanky frame, "time was when they sent better."

Cadis stared at him coldly and then dropped his eyes as L'Heureux glared back and spit a brown stream past his legs and onto the ramp.

He took the acceleration couch L'Heureux indicated and fifteen minutes later they were planet-free and in null-drive. Cadis discovered the reason for L'Heureux's rusty-looking whiskers as the ship went into free fall. For a moment he fought a heavy nausea compounded of weightlessness and innumerable tiny droplets of tobacco juice that floated through the air of the ship in the breeze of the air-circulation units.

"You're a tender one," L'Heureux said, turning in mid-air above him.

Cadis tried to answer, then pressed his lips tightly together.

The next three days, he fought a constant battle against tobacco juice, bread crumbs, various items of laundry—in short anything that L'Heureux cared to discard indiscriminantly. Every foreign object on the ship seemed to take to the air and develop an unnatural afinity for him.

Worse, he began to itch.

CADIS WASN'T quite sure how or when it started. There were no adequate facilities for keeping clean, of course, and he had not had the opportunity to bathe before leaving Land's End. However, the itch which he developed began to reach epic proportions. Along with this, he developed a sense of lightheadedness quite apart from the sensations of free fall.

It was several days before he realized that something was wrong. Through a burning haze, he told L'Heureux.

"Hah. Probably the blight."

"Blight?"

"The corn blight."

"Very funny, I'm sure," he said, through a red mist that drifted over his senses.

"Think ye'd be tougher at your age," L'Heureux said.

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"I'm just thirty-eight," Cadis lied automatically, but with only weak conviction.

"Huh," L'Heureux snorted. "You married?"

Cadis shook his head. For a moment vision dissolved in a black cloud. With sudden panic he realized that was on the verge of fainting.

And he itched abominably.

"Well, maybe things ain't so bad," L'Heureux said, eyeing him speculatively. "Now, I got me a daughter named Nettie. Looks kinda frail, but she's s t r o n g e r nor any mule..."

"I like being a bachelor," Cadis said painfully.

"Tain't what you like."

"What's wrong with being a bachelor? There's no law against it."

S o m e t h i n g was terrible wrong, Cadis realized. The cabin had assumed a distorted air of unreality. He felt himself sinking into a black fog.

From a great distance, he heard L'Heureux laugh and laugh and laugh.

The last thing he heard was the man gloating words, "On New Glendale they is."

II

LEJA LORIS, Green Princess of Varoom, spurred her six legged Droat across the crimson desert. He followed close on her flank, his own mount churning the desert sands with its three-toed clawed feet. Far ahead the brilliant towers of the Crystal City caught the morning light, splitting the cobalt rays of the setting blue sun and mingling them with the bright emerald of the rising green sun. It still lacked an hour before Varoom's third sun appeared above the horizon and the desert air was cold.

Leja Loris reined her steed suddenly, her biceps swelling beneath the broad bands of copper that encircled her arms. The Droat's laboring feet clawed at the sand, futilely contesting her strength. Then it sank wearily to its padded knees and in a single fluid motion of her lithe body Leja Loris leaped to the sand in a haze of gauze-like robes.

A second later he was beside her, his bare bronzed arms encircling her waist.

"H e r e, my love," she breathed, "we will make our stand."

"You mean, fight them?" he asked uncertainly, his hand straying weakly to the massive broadsword at his waist.

"Listen," she said.

The chill air was filled with the distant throb of a flyer. He looked far out over the red desert to the City of Exquisite Agony from which they had fled. Silhouetted against the setting blue sun, the dark speck of the flyer sped toward them.

Gal-douch!

Gal-douch, the Torturer!

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"DEAR LOVE," she said, caressing the hard line of his jaw with her eager fingers, "we must die in each other's arms."

"But I don't want to die," he protested.

"Hush, Alby," she said, her face suddenly stern. (His mother, he remembered, had always looked like that when he tried to protest some command.)

"You are strong," she said.

"So I am."

He pulled her firm body to his, aware of the disaphanous garments that billowed about her and fell to the desert sand. Her flesh was warm in his bare arms, smooth and soft with an underlying firmness.

"Just as you are strong," he said in a voice thick with excitement and desire.

The heavy beat of the flyer echoed from the sky and he looked up to find the swift open vessel almost upon them. In the prow stood the hughly obese figure of Galdouch, his great body brilliant in platinum armor, his wild yellow hair and crimson-stained beard framing blazing eyes of accusation. His heavy arm was extended in a gesture of menace, the flashing broadsword in his fist flashing avenging blue light.

"It's too late, you beast," he sobbed and bent the Princess to him. She was warmth and desire and soft yielding, blending into his manly strength with sudden surrender as his mouth approached the full redness of her rich lips.

She closed her eyes and murmured softly...ecstatically...

"JEHOSAPHRAT, what a cream puff."

"Shut up, you idjit," a rumbling voice said from the darkness that suddenly swallowed the princess of Varoom. "Wonder is the boy ain't in a worse state."

"'Boy', she says."

"Well, he ain't no withered-up lemon like you, Terrence L'Heureux."

"I think he's kinda cute," a third younger voice said in thin feminine tones.

"Nettie, turn up the light," the rumbling voice said.

"Yes'm."

Alfred Cadis became conscious of the sensations of his body; he was resting on something very soft. His whole body was consumed with a nagging itch, and his nose wrinkled with the first hint of a coming sneeze. He tried to move and discovered that he was weighted down with what felt like endless layers of cloth. He suddenly realized that he was cold, as a chill draft penetrated to his bare arms, raising a rash of goose flesh.

He opened his eyes.

"You see," the rumbling voice said, "your blathering woke him up."

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In the yellow light from a flickering lantern on a table in the corner of the room, he saw that the rumbling voice belong to a woman.

A woman?

WELL, THERE might be some doubt in certain circles. She was massive. She towered above L'Heureux as a Sequoia towers above a scrub pine. Without the contrasting figure of the Captain, she might have seemed squat, she was so wide. Below s t e v e d o r e shoulders, her breasts swelled like ramparts guarding the heavy belly and gross hips which they threatened to envelop with their sheer weight.

"Don't you m o v e," the woman said. "You just got yourself a touch of the blight."

"Blight?" Cadis demanded and tried to sit up.

He was in a massive, antique bed with patinaed brass scrollwork forming intricate designs about the brass tubes that composed the foot. A mound of quilted comforters pressed him down into the soft yielding mattress. With a thrill of horror he realized all at once that the bedding was a ticking stuffed with—he felt his stomach twist—with feathers. No wonder he was itching so violently.

"Now, I'm Missus Gaelmicha, should you want to know," the woman said, moving into the light; "though they usually call me Mom Gaelmicha or just Mom."

"What's this a b o u t the blight?"

"Well, you know about that," L'Heureux said.

"What you came here for," Mom Gaelmicha added.

SHE HAD moved into the dim light from the lamp. Perhaps, he thought, it was the highlights, but the effect was startling. He had expected a face whose features were smothered beneathe suety layers of fat. Instead he saw thick brows and features that looked as if they had been blasted from tough granite, without the finesse of final polishing.

The woman oozed strength. Like...he couldn't think for a moment of whom she reminded him. But there was something a little frightening in the half-remembered resemblance.

"I came here because of the corn blight," Cadis said uncertainly.

"And," L'Heureux chuckled, "that's exactly what you got."

"Don't you worry, though," Mom Gaelmicha said. "You'll be right as rain tomorrow. Meantimes, N e t t i e 'll tend you."

He looked toward the flickering light. The girl was partly hidden in shadows, but what he saw was disturbing. *Tall and a t h l e t i c looking, peasant type,* he thought.

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"I can take care of myself," he said. "What I want to know..."

"Tomorrow," Mom Gaelmicha said and turned with L'Heureux toward the door. Before he could protest, she was gone, the door closing with great finality behind her.

"DON'T YOU fret," Nettie said in a firm voice. "I'll fend for you."

"I've had just about enough," he announced angrily. He pushed the heavy comforters from him and rolled violently from the bed. The mattress shifted at the last minute, tumbling him to the cold floor.

Cadis rose to his feet, massaging the bruised bare flesh.

Bare?

He looked down at himself; then he plunged for the protection of the bed and the comforters.

Nettie was giggling. "You're pretty."

III

"THE BLIGHT," Joseph Tennat said, surveying the endless stretches of yellow-green corn from the low hill, "is a tribulation over which we are meant to have no control. It is a test. I do not approve of your presence here."

Alfred Cadis eyed the man in amazement. *Where in hell,* he thought, *did he get those buckskin trousers and shirt?* The stuff didn't look like a synthetic.

"Balderdash," Mom Gaelmicha said.

"Hold your tongue, woman." Tennat fingered the Mayor's medallion that hung from a plastic throng around his neck.

"Yet," Cadis said softly, "from what Mrs. Gaelmicha tells me, if you don't solve the problem of the blight, the colony may well fail."

Tennat seemed to stiffen. He was thin and dark; he wore his authority as if it were a tunic of metal that forced each movement and expression into a stiff formalized pattern. His thin, Ascetic face was set in motionless layers under thin brooding eyebrows. Only the lips held any defineable expression, and these were pressed together in a wrinkle of faint distaste.

"New Glendale," Mayor Tennat said, "is not just a place. New Glendale is an idea, an oasis of strength in this wanton age. It cannot fail."

"Huh," snorted Mom Gaelmicha. "Let's go down and see the corn." She favored Cadis with a look of patience sorely tried.

TENNAT led the way down through tall reed-like grass that reached to the knees. The ground was soft and spongy and between the

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hummocks of grass, Cadis could see a soft carpet of purplish-grey moss. Mom Gaelmicha puffed heavily beside him. He took her arm and felt thick muscles tense under layers of fat.

"Thanks," she said heavily. "'Tain't often an old crow like me gets a helping hand from a good-looking youngster."

Cadis felt his face flush as Tennat stopped beside a stand of corn. The man began to kick vigorously at the ground with a heavy toe, throwing gouts of red-yellow dirt into the air. "Heathen growth," he puffed.

The edge of the stand was being invaded by the purple-grey moss which had carpeted the ground. Cadis kneeled and inspected the roots of the nearest corn plant. The white filament roots, looking for all the world like the clawed fingers of an old man clutching at the soil, were covered by a thin layer of the moss. It cloacked the exposed roots in a fine grey down that stopped at the base of the plant. As nearly as he could see, the plant had not suffered from the parasite.

In fact, the plant was one of the few that looked at all healthy. The plants further into the stand had yellowed, drooping leaves and listless tassels which hung limply from the crown of the stalk. He pushed the nearer plants aside and moved into one of the rows. The edges of many leaves were curled while their tips were browned and dying. He pulled a dwarfed ear from one of the stalks and shucked it, throwing the dry silk to the ground. The ear was hard and discolored.

"Have you had a frost?" he asked.

"ON NEW GLENDALE?" Mom Gaelmicha snickered. "The yearly mean temperature is sixty degrees. Don't vary three degrees either way from one year to the next."

"A paradise," Tennat said dreamily, "with just the bite needed to remind one that work has to be done."

"This looks like frost damage," Cadis said.

"Oh?" Mom Gaelmicha pressed in to look. Cadis was conscious of her bosom pressing against his arm. He handed the ear to her and leaned over to finger the heavy corn stalk. Its surface felt spongy. Under the pressure of his fingers, the surface indented as though something had ruptured the supporting cellulose fibers.

"That's the way they all been," Mom Gaelmicha said.

They retired to the open area before the corn, and Jacob Tennat scratched his chest vigorously.

"What's wrong?" Cadis demanded.

"It's merely a touch of the blight coming on."

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"Nonsense," Cadis said. "Just corn fuzz."

THEY RETURNED to the low hill overlooking the stand and mounted the beetle which had brought them to the sight. As he settled himself in the middle seat of the vehicle, Cadis was aware of Mom Gaelmicha's eyes on his back.

Tennat slapped the starter, and the hidden gyros whirred gratingly. With a jerk, the supporting wheels retracted and the beetle plowed slowly across the open ground separating the corn stand from the one next to it.

The whole valley was filled with young corn, divided neatly into quarter acre stands. It swelled up the low slope to the settlement like a sea of green. Only the outlying sections of the planted area, however, had come to earning, as yet—which was odd, since they were last planted.

They followed a narrow lane between the stands until it broke into the main street of the settlement. He would never get used to it, Cadis decided. If one ignored the bright shaft of the *Hope*—the original colonial ship—arrowing up from the plain to the west of the settlement, the scene looked like something out of a bad historical novel.

The crude buildings were apparently made of logs, with hinged windows and chimneys meant to service huge fireplaces. And some distance up the slope and removed from the settlement, a stockade, complete with watchtowers and firing slits.

Only instead of being of logs, the settlement and the stockade were of fused dirt, melted and roughly sculptured with a heat beam into the semblance of structures made of logs.

Sheer insanity! There was even a flag flying atop the central tower of the stockade, a bright banner of red and white stripes with a blue field, in which a circle of stars gleamed brightly.

THEY PASSED through a massive gate, near which two sloppily-uniformed guards sat on the bare ground. There was a rattling of chains, and a moment later a plastic portcullis fell, blocking the gate. Cadis wasn't sure, but there seemed something anachronistic about the portcullis. He decided that he'd better not remark about it.

The supporting wheels of the beetle fell with a thump as the gyros cut off. The Mayor climbed from the vehicle and yelled, "L'Heureux."

L'Heureux's face appeared above the rail that rimmed the firing platform between the watch towers. "You want me?"

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"Take a detail out to number two stand. There are still two heat beams with a charge. I want that heathen moss burned away from the good ground."

"If we use those charges," L'Heureux protested, "we won't have any serviceable beams 'til they rewind the generator."

"Don't argue, man. I won't have a heathen growth contaminating good Earth corn."

Small groups of men and women were moving toward them from the rustic buildings in the compound. Most of the women wore tight bodices and full skirts, bulked by layered petticoats. The men generally were clad in the same pseudo-buckskin that the Mayor affected, although a few wore blue uniforms with bright red lapels and shiny brass buttons.

"YOU DON'T look happy," Mom Gaelmicha said at Cadis's elbow.

He looked at her silently.

"Fact is," she said, "you look downright uncomfortable!"

"I want to talk to you when you have the time."

"Mayor, I'll take our Mister over to the lab," Mom Gaelmicha said.

The Mayor nodded absently, and walked toward the group of men being assembled by L'Heureux.

"Come on," the woman said. "Just what's your position around here?" Cadis demanded as he followed her across the compound.

"Me?" Sorta mid-wife, though we ain't had no children yet. Then I take care of the lab."

"Are you a technician?"

They paused beside a windowless cabin and she motioned him in. "Technician? Land, no. I'm a hex woman."

Cadis whirled angrily as the door closed behind them and hidden light sources glowed softly. He had a fleeting impression of gleaming worktables, an analytical balance, a portable multi-spectrum microscope. "I've had just about enough!"

"Keep your voice down," Mom Gaelmicha said briskly. "In this day and age, such nonsense."

Mom Gaelmicha placed thick hands on heavy hips and glared at him. "Mister Cadis," she said precisely, "I feel you might better fulfill your mission here if you learn some measure of self-discipline."

For some seconds, Cadis was too shocked to speak.

IV

MOM GAELMICHA lowered her bulk onto a light laboratory stool and glared at him scornfully. "Well, they certainly sent me the leavings. Didn't they brief you on this job?"

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Alfred Cadis shook his head silently.

"For heaven's sake," she said, "you don't think the Colonial Bureau's going to let a bunch of anti-social primitives loose on a new world without watching them?"

"Well," he managed. "The thought hadn't occurred that..."

"Then you'd better do some thinking. We spent a lot of money to bring you out here."

"Oh," he said, brightening, "then there's more to it, than this silly blight?"

For an instant his eyes were filled with visions of secret meetings, vague deeds of derring-do, the sort of thing a Jon Carpenter might do by the side of Leja Loris.

"You seem to have a talent for jumping to conclusions," Mom Gaelmicha interrupted.

"Well, you surely don't care what happens to a group of near-schizophrenics like the *New Glendalers*."

"OH, FOR HEAVENS sake," she said again vehemently. "You and the stay-at-homes centerwise make me sick. All the frontier worlds have been settled by malcontents, by the unadjusted, the slightly abnormal who can't quite get along in our tight little civilization in the center of the galaxy."

"But they're all insane," Cadis protested.

"Don't be naive. They're no more insane that the Mormons or the Pilgrims five centuries ago. In fact, by California standards where they started, they're a little dull. Tennat—who started this movement—is a historian of sorts; he decided that the universe was going to hell in the proverbial basket, and that only a return to the simple basic virtues of four centuries ago could redeem it. The point is, we don't want this colony to fail and if the blight isn't licked, it may well do that."

He stood for moments, digesting this information. Mom Gaelmicha sat like a mountain of authority, waiting for him to speak. The sight of her great bulk in its new perspective was somehow frightening.

"Very well," he said at last. "Now, what do you know about the blight?"

SHE EYED him intently. "That's better; well, somehow they've associated what's happening to the corn with another problem. You've had some experience with it. It's a sort of anaphylactic reaction that manifests itself as a skin irritation or a rash. There doesn't seem to be any discernable cause. We've rid the whole area of native vegetation. Atmospheric analyses by the automatic equipment of nitrogen, oxygen, several inert gases, and some hydrocarbon vapors other

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than carbon dioxide—but in minute concentrations. We're still using largely offplanet food."

"Any unusual symptoms?"

"Chillblains."

"I thought you said the temperature rarely went below sixty."

"*Never* below sixty," she said. "That's what it looks like, though; quite a number of the blight suffers wind up with a skin condition resembling chillblains."

"This whole place is insane," Cadis said.

"And then there's the rats."

"Rats?"

"Well, some small rodent-like creature. We've trapped one or two, but they died. They have an omnivorous appetite. That's why we're using oil lamps now. The beasties chewed all the insulation off our man generator. We're rewinding it now."

"Well," he said, "it looks as if a little poison spread about..."

"That's what we thought. We killed a few with arsenicals. After a while, arsenicals didn't work. Then the beasties became immune to seleno compounds, cyanide, and organic phosphones. It's got so they even thrive on XDP."

HE WAS ABOUT to say something when the door flew open and Captain L'Heureux thrust his head into the room. "Better come help."

"What's the matter?" Mom Gaelmicha demanded, rising to her feet.

"It's the weeding crew, the ones the Mayor sent out to burn out the moss. They all come down with the blight."

"It never rains," she said, getting ponderously to her feet.

L'Heureux vanished from the doorway. She fumbled in one of the great pockets of her dress and produced a vial. Inside was a single large capsule. "Here, take this. Go on, it ain't poison."

He eyed the capsule for a moment and then popped it into his mouth. "What's that?" Cadis demanded. "Some anti-blight medicine?"

"Uh, uh," she said, turning to the door. "Promised Nettie I'd give it to you."

He grabbed his throat.

"Nettie?" he said hoarsely.

"Well," she said with a crooked smile, "long's you're here in New Glendale, you got to abide by the laws. Like the ones concerning bachelors."

She had lapsed into the outlandish New Glendale drawl with no visible effort.

"You can't be serious," he said.

"Nettie's taken a shine to you." She eyed him slowly from head to foot. "Give me ten or fifteen less years and I might my own self."

Cadis flushed uncomfortably. "What's that got to do with taking pills?"

"What else would you do with a love potion?"

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She was through the door before he could speak, leaving him with a sense that the walls were closing in about him.

V

CADIS PRESSED the syringe against the man's bare arm, and tripped the trigger. The man's arm jerked spasmodically as the high pressue spray penetrated the skin. "All right; that should help a bit."

The man nodded his head silently and tried to scratch at the patch of hair on his chest. Cadis grabbed the hand and lowered it to the bed.

Before he drew the sheets over the patient, Cadis looked at the inflamed areas of the chest and belly where the man's nails had lacerated the flesh. The skin was grey-blue with a coarse almost scaled appearance. "Take it easy," he said. "You'll sleep in a minute.

He walked down the aisle, between beds filled with the silent figures of the men from the heat beam detail, and into the small dispensery at the front of the colony hospital.

"Why in heavens didn't you bring a medic when you came?" he demanded.

MOM GAELMICHA looked up, tiredly. "Try to persuade an M. D. to come out here.

We've all had courses on first aid, and a few advanced training in basic sanitation and general chemotherapy. Beyond that, well..."

She shrugged her great shoulders.

"The anti-histamines seem to help," he said, depositing the jet syringe beside a tray of others.

"What do you think it is?"

"How should I know? It looked like some allergic reaction; that's why I tried an anti-histamine. Shotgun therapy, nothing more. Have you had much of this?"

"Nothing this bad before. Your own attack was the first instance in which anyone's been more than inconvenienced by it."

"Well, it almost killed those six men in there."

"We'll have to get a medic in here now," she said. "If we last long enough."

"It shouldn't take more than two or three weeks."

"Don't get optimistic. There's no null-wave transmitter on New Glendale, and L'Heureux can't get off-planet for another eighteen months."

"Eighteen months?"

"That's right. The fuel for the shuttle ship is manufactured in the pile of the *Hope*, the ship that brought us here. She's an old Mark VI freighter, reconverted, which means it takes that long to manufacture enough fuel."

"Well, what's wrong with taking the *Hope*?"

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"You'd have to convince Tennat—and that's a hopeless task, believe me."

Cadis busied himself for several minutes, fixing some small sections of tissue in parafin.

"I took some sections of skin from several of the men," he said at last. "I want to take them over to the lab and see what they look like under the 'scope."

"I'll keep watch here."

HE LEFT her sitting tiredly at the work table, and started across the compound, so Mom Gaelmicha had told him, was normally lighted by strings of filament bulbs; but the "rats," had attacked the insulation of the wires so often that, had the generator been functioning, the lines would have shorted instantly. They had been without illumination in the compound for several weeks now.

"Oof!" The breath was driven suddenly from Cadis, as he collided with a body in the dark. He clutched the box containing the parafin fixed skin sections and said, "Oh, sorry,"

"That's all right," a feminine voice said.

For a moment, he thought it was L'Heureux's daughter, Nettie, but then a match glowed briefly and he saw that the voice belonged to someone else. "Oh," she said, "you be the in-lander."

BEFORE the match flickered out, Cadis had a quick impression of blonde or light brown hair, high cheekbones and full sensuous lips.

"I'm Sue Milsatdt," she said, her voice suddenly silky in the half dark. "I been wanting to meet you."

A sudden suspicion hit him. "Do you normally meet people by deliberately running into them in the dark?"

He was suddenly conscious of her warmth as she stepped very close to him. Firm flesh brushed his arm. "It ain't as if I did any wrong," she breathed. "I think it might be nice for us to be acquainted."

He tried to back away but she was pressing forward. "I . . . I have a great deal of work to do," he said. "I can't stay to talk. . . Perhaps later we can have a long conversation," he added in desperation.

"I'd sure like that," she said softly.

He moved quickly to the side and before she could recover, he was past her. He could see the glow of lamps and he made for them.

"Later," she called softly after him.

HE FOUND the laboratory building before he reached the lights. Cadis fumbled for a switch in the wall box, inside the door, and heard the whirr of a hidden motor as the rods of the small lab pile slid into their undamped position. Then he

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fumbled on the other side of the door until he found the light switch. Florescent ceiling panels glowed whitely and the lab was suddenly brilliantly lighted. He was glad that Tennat had preserved sufficient good sense in his obsession to provide a separate power source for the lab. It would be impossible, Cadis realized, to operate some of the equipment such as the microscope on the low wattage of the mercury turbine and pile that powered the colony proper.

He found the microtome and started to make sections of the tissue specimens he'd taken from the stricken men. He'd avoided using quick freeze technique on the sections because of the appearance of the skin, suggesting as it did something similar to frostbite.

An hour later, he stepped back from the screen of the microscope in disgust. He'd checked sections under the electron beam, under visible and u-v light. There was no sign of any sort of obviously foreign virus—only the usual staphyloccoci, and other bacteria one might expect. For a short time, he'd thought he had something in a few shreds of what appeared to be fungus, but reference to one of the books from the lab library convinced him that the stuff was a common enough growth, indigenous originally to Terra.

HE REALIZED, of course, that this sort of thing was completely outside of his speciality and that he might have missed a dozen clues to the source of the trouble. Cadis wished he could trust himself to run a few biopsies on nervous tissue from the stricken men, but that, he decided, was beyond him at the moment.

When he finally switched to a lower magnification using visible light and began to examine the cell structure, he knew that he had hit upon something. The cells looked shriveled and dehydrated. A great many of the walls were ruptured, and the cytoplasm inside lacked definition. Freezing might do that to a cell, but who had ever heard of this sort of thing at sixty degrees?

He finally quit in disgust and damped the pile. He stepped outside, before the ceiling panels had ceased glowing, and waited for his eyes to become accustomed to the darkness. New Glendale's small moon was making its swift transit across the night sky—its second of the evening he calculated—and the compound was feebily lighted by its rays.

He moved toward the gate, answered the sleeply challenge of the guard and passed through to the outside.

THE SETTLEMENT proper was some distance down

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the hill from the stockade, the deceptively crude houses gathered roughly into a series of blocks with a main street running through the center, and several streets running perpendicular to it.

Behind the town, tall stands of corn stretched out toward the foothills that ringed the valley. In the white moonlight, the whole scene had an unreal, dreamlike quality. Only an occasional light still burned in the windows of the low buildings as he passed through the streets.

Cadis guessed that it must be close to two in the morning, and wondered how Mom Gaelmicha was doing back in the hospital. Well, he could do little more there, and he might as well get some sleep. The one room building where he had been billeted was down a side street on the edge of the settlement. It had been a dormitory at the start of the colony, but all the beds had been removed, except the one which they'd set up for him. "Bachelor House" Mom Gaelmicha had called it. Only, he thought, there were no more bachelors in New Glendale. None, but Alfred Cadis.

He paused on the stoop, looked out over the field of corn that stretched from the side of the building, and wondered where the animals were kept. He realized that he'd seen no signs of cattle—or, more important, pigs—since he'd arrived. He'd noticed several small vegetable gardens in various spots throughout the settlement, but no animals of any sort.

He was looking out across the corn field when he saw a sudden flash of white. For a moment he thought that it was his imagination. Then he saw it again.

SOMEONE was moving silently through the corn, stopping occasionally as though listening for some sound. Cadis waited, wondering whether he should call out. The white shape was moving in his direction, he saw. He stepped from the porch and moved toward the shape. At the edge of the corn field, he stood, looking down the space between the lines of plants. The long shadows of the plants half darkened the space between them. In another ten minutes, the moon would set and he would be in total darkness.

He stood as the shadows lengthened. Then for an instant he saw white movement; something flitted from one row to another, passing across his sight, barely fifty feet away.

He waited but the form did not appear again. Long minutes passed as the light in the sky died. When the night again closed in, he turned toward the dormitory.

Inside, he undressed in the darkness, feeling the chill of the night close in upon him.

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He draped his clothing across a rude chair beside the bed, as his flesh prickled with the cold. His blind hands found the thick coverlets, and he slid between them into the bed.

In the next instant, Alfred Cadis yelled and leaped out, his big toe picking up a splinter from the floor in the process. "Get out of my bed!"

"Your feet's cold," a sleepy voice complained.

HE FUMBLED in his pockets searching for a match. The bed creaked and he heard bare feet smack the floor.

"Ain't you coming back?" the voice demanded.

"Who...who is it?"

"You told me you wanted to talk later," the voice said complainingly.

"I said get out of my bed," he said, trying to strike a match.

The flame blossomed suddenly.

It was the girl he'd met in the compound, the one called Sue something-or-other. He identified the light hair and the high cheekbones and...

He lowered his eyes and the match fell from his fingers. "You...you..." he managed.

"I thought you wanted to talk," she said.

"You...put something on."

He heard her rise from the bed.

"Stay away." In the next instant he turned, and started for the door.

He had barely taken five steps when he sat down heavily.

"Ouch," a voice complained from the darkness. "You stepped on my toe."

"I'll do more than that if you don't go," he snapped, wondering how she'd managed to get to the door that quickly.

"You ain't supposed to feel that way," the voice said.

"Nettie L'Heureux, you git out," Sue's voice said from behind him. "I got here first."

"Merciful heavens," he groaned, "what is this? A convention?"

VI

IT WAS OVER an hour before he managed to rid himself of them. They left side by side, each bitterly accusing the other of being an interloper.

When he finally returned to his bed, Alfred Cadis tossed for half an hour before he finally dropped off to sleep. His dreams were filled with visions of unclothed women pursuing him down endless rows of corn. To make matters worse, there was snow on the ground and he was barefooted. His feet were freezing... and overhead a baleful blue sun burned down.

Each time he looked back, the pursuers seemed to gain.

There seemed endless num-

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bers of them and sometimes they wore the faces of Nettie L'Heureux and Sue Milstadt. The features were constantly changing, however, fading into the face of Mom Gaelmicha and Leja Loris, into the faces of a dozen women he'd noticed idly in the compound that day.

The face of Leja Loris persisted, but he was not Jon Carpenter; he was only Alfred Edward Cadis, fleeing from the advances of an endless host of predatory women.

He stumbled and fell, and he knew that they were about to overtake him. They would fall on him and do unspeakable things to him, unless... He rolled over and looked into a white emotionless face. The face seemed to shift, to flow into the features of Leja Loris.

The expression was faintly quizzical, as if the owner were somehow baffled at his reaction. Cold hands caressed his shoulder, ice-cold hands that brought a thrill of reaction to his bare flesh. But the face and the white body below it was desirable beyond words.

But the face...inhuman... without character...searching for some meaning to his sudden desire...

HE SAT UPRIGHT in bed. The room was shrouded in darkness. He was shivering with cold, and for a moment he thought he was still dreaming. His blind hand found the bedclothing where it had drifted to the foot of the bed.

There was a faint movement in the darkness. He clutched the coverlet and held his breath. For a moment, he was afraid that they had returned, but the noise did not repeat itself. He lay down, pulled the coverlet over his head, and fell into an exhausted sleep.

The cold face of the white woman haunted him with wide questioning eyes, eyes which were set in the hauntingly desirable face of Leja Loris.

THE NEXT morning, Cadis changed to a pair of buckskin trousers and a tasseled shirt with a drawstring neck —the outfit which Mom Gaelmicha had given him the day before—and went looking for the woman. He found her at the generator shack, watching L'Heureux and a technician whom he had not met, running final tests on the rewound generator. The low, drafty building was filled with the muted sob of the low calory pile and its mercury heat exchanger.

He told her what had happened the night before.

"They won't like that," she said.

Atop the squat generator housing, L'Heureux began to swear mightily.

"Well," Cadis said, "I can't say I care for... They? Whom do you mean by 'they'?"

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"Uhmmm," Mom Gaelmicha said and yawned. "Didn't get a wink last night."

"Who's 'they'?" he insisted.

"The other girls. . . . Calvin Shotts," she bawled at the technician, who was leaning precariously over the side of a makeshift scaffolding to apply a screwdriver to the brushes of the generator, "you'll crack your skull sure."

"The other girls? You mean there's more?"

"Whyn't you go out and look at the corn?"

"*What other girls?*"

" 'Bout twenty, I'd say."

"Single girls?"

"Well, you don't need worry 'bout no other kind."

"I thought New Glendale started out pretty evenly divided as to sexes."

"Did."

"Well?"

"Don't you 'well' me in that tone of voice," she said, her voice suddenly hard with authority.

CADIS STEPPED back involuntarily, feeling like a small boy surprised with jam on his face. Then he realized that she had effectively stolen the initiative from him.

She smiled at him for long uncomfortable moments and then reached out to pat his cheek lightly. "Don't you fret yourself. I'm just getting crotchety in my old age."

He felt himself reddening with pleasure. This was ridiculous, he thought. Fawing like a puppy who has just been spanked and immediately petted.

But what a warm, basically kindly woman she was.

"It's just..." he stammered. "Well, things are different here than in Boston."

"You're too nice a boy to worry your head," she said. "Don't you think twice; Mom Gaelmicha's got plans of her own about..."

"There's them that works instead of jawing all the time," L'Heureux said bitterly as he bounced from behind the heat exchanger and approached them.

"THERE *IS* a shortage of men," Mom Gaelmicha said, all business. "That's why the Mayor called on the common bed law and made being a bachelor criminal Lots of precedent for..."

"Heh, heh," L'Heureux chuckled, "the lad getting cold in his bachelor bed?"

"You be a dirty-minded heathen," Mom Gaelmicha said.

"Don't you think I ain't wary o' what you're thinking," L'Heureux snapped.

"Shut up and mind your business." Mom Gaelmicha turned and lumbered through the door, while L'Heureux stood, staring after her and rubbing his greasy hands on his buckskin trousers.

"She sure brews a mess of trouble for small pickings," L'Heureux said.

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"What's that mean," Cadis asked.

L'Heureux cocked his head and laughed. "You be finding out soon enough."

He left L'Heureux in the generator shack and went back to the lab. For the rest of the morning, Cadis worked with the skin sections he had mounted. There was nothing further, it seemed, to be found from the specimens and finally he threw the things into the incinerator.

THE PRIMARY problem of the corn blight was still his main interest, he decided. After all, there was no reason really to connect the anaphlactic reaction and the corn blight, beyond a certain nagging association between the frozen appearance of the corn and the symptoms of chill-blains, and cell rupture he'd noted in the skin sections.

He decided to quit for lunch. As he made his way across the compound toward the gate, he noticed that L'Heureux was shepherding several work parties in setting up heavy charging units of the sort that might power a portable heat or tractor beam, drawing its power from a broadcast beam from the power shack and storing it in aleph-gap condersers. Near the gate he saw several light heat beams with the charging units already mounted and the power antennae fully extended.

"What's all this?" he asked the guard by the gate.

"Them be the weeders," the man said slowly.

"Weeders?"

"They be used to kill out the weeds so's more corn can be planted."

He passed through the gate and made for the communal kitchen at the far end of the settlement's main street. Well, he thought, Tennat's disdain for the present century didn't prevent him from using its methods. He supposed that the temperature of the heat beams could be lowered enough to destroy the rank alien growths without destroying the humus of the soil. Very selective, though it seemed unlikely that the same beams could be used in the corn fields already planted, without great care.

A SMALL group had lined up in front of the entrance to the dining hall and Cadis found a place in their rear. He paid little attention to the low conversation and occasional jokes passed down the line ahead of him. Most of the men were clad in the ubiquitous buckskin, much soiled by their labors. He wondered at the function of the uniformed men, and gathered that the military garb was largely a concession to Tennat's sense of rightness. The men who had been manning the heat beams were uniformed, of course, as were

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the sentries by the gate of the stockade. It seemed, he thought, a little silly; but no one else seemed to think so.

He felt something firm and provocatively shaped against his arm and there was suddenly the heavy scent of cloves in his nostrils.

"Hello, you ain't mad, mister?" a silky voice said.

"Oh, for heaven's sake," he said and stared straight ahead.

"I sure didn't mean to peeve you," Sue Milstadt's voice said softly.

"I'm not peeved," he said stuffily.

"I sorta thought maybe you liked me."

"Would you mind not moving in so close?"

"I took a bath and scented myself. Don't that show I want to be friends?"

"Friends?" He turned and looked at her. She'd bound her hair with some faded ribbon so that it piled high on her head. The dress she wore was a light blue synthetic, and her young, hard-muscled body filled it in a most disturbing manner.

"PLEASE," he said with difficulty, "I can appreciate your situation but... Look, don't you have a boy friend?

"Did."

"What happened to him?"

"Witchwoman got him."

"You mean Mom Gaelmicha?"

"Huh," Sue snorted. "I mean the one from over the hills."

"You mean there's another settlement?"

"No other. He just wandered off. Been seeing that witchwoman, just like the rest of them."

"Rest?"

"All the other good-for-nothings, the ones that wouldn't work. She's got her a mighty big desire."

He saw Mom Gaelmicha striding purposefully for the line from the direction of the stockade.

"What witchwoman are you talking about?" he asked hurriedly, before the other woman could get within hearing.

"The one that hexed the corn."

"You know you ain't supposed to be here," Mom Gaelmicha said as she lumbered up to them.

Sue Milstadt turned swiftly. Her hand flew to her face. "Oh. You ain't gonna tell."

"Not if you git."

The younger woman walked a few steps, and looked back.

"I said go on, "Mom Gaelmicha intoned.

AS THE GIRL withdrew, Cadis said, "Look here, that wasn't necessary."

"It was to keep from having an outright war."

"War?"

"Well, the girls in the settlement drew lots to see who had next chance at you."

He stood for a moment di-

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gesting this bit of news. He could feel the anger beginning to burn in him. "That's the last straw," he said fiercely. "It isn't enough I get sent to this god-forsaken place. Now I'm being raffled off."

"Here now, don't you fuss. You're all right."

"I'll do what I please," he said.

"Don't raise your voice. It's all for your own good."

"Who's after my virtue now? Nettie L'Heureux?"

"Nettie. No, she's disqualified for last night; so's Sue."

"So, who won the next chance."

Mom Gaelmicha lowered her eyes and gazed at her ample middle. Then she giggled.

"Oh, no!"

Mom Gaelmicha looked up fiercely, her black eyes staring. "It ain't as terrible as you might think," she said hotly.

VII

HE WAS SO furious that he could barely eat his lunch. Mom Gaelmicha had followed him into the dining hall, but Cadis had outmaneuvered her by taking the sole remaining seat at a crowded table.

He was busily attacking an ear of roasted corn when one of the men, a giant with flaming red hair and a receding chin, nudged his neighbor and said, "Our bachelor's got him a mighty fine appetite."

"Suppose he's fattening for the slaughter," the smaller, black-haired one said.

Cadis glared at him silently and renewed his attack on the ear of corn.

At the end of the table, a thin, freckled man in his early twenties looked up and said, "Leave him be."

"Eric's sure full of the milk of kindness these days," the small dark man said.

"New dads get that way," noted the redhead.

"Maybe you wish you was single," the small one said.

"You can shut your mouth, Frank Bark," said Eric.

"Maybe you and him could chase her then," The redhead guffawed loudly.

"She sure didn't give you a tumble before you was hitched," Eric said.

"That's a lie," snapped the redhead.

"Oh, let him be," the one called Bark said.

They lapsed into silence and Cadis nodded at the man named Eric, who had interceded for him.

LATER, AS they were carrying their dishes to the wash hopper, he found himself behind the man. "Thanks," he said. "I'd had just about all I could take."

"Nothing's needed. Name's Eric Wharton, by the way. I 'spect thing's is getting pretty hot for you."

"Hot isn't the word," Cadis admitted, as they walked to the door. "Say, what's all this

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about 'her'. They mean the hex woman?"

"Oh, you seen her already?"

"Well, not exactly. Just heard about her."

"Not surprised," Eric said. "I'd sure give a wad for the chance. She's mighty handsome, I hear tell."

"Do only men see her?" Cadis demanded, wondering what exactly they were talking about.

"No," Eric said after a moment. "Seems that *most* of them what sees her are, though. And mostly the bachelors, now since the women got smart. Last one was Mark Balsemo last month."

"What happened to him?"

ERIC SHRUGGED. "They all just sort of go away. Can't say I blame them."

"Have you ever seen her?"

"No, and I don't care to. Got me a nice wife, and a baby coming. Be the first one in the settlement if all goes well."

"I wondered about that," he said. "The settlement's been here almost two years, hasn't it?"

"Well, nobody likes to talk about it."

"About what."

"Well, there ain't no kids, up to now. Mostly early miscarriages. Some trouble with animals. Don't make sense."

"Sense?" Cadis asked. "I'm beginning to wonder what does make sense around here."

He stopped at the lab to get a specimen kit, borrowed a beetle, and set out for the number two stand of corn where he had been with Tennat, L'Heureux and Mom Gaelmicha the day before.

THE NUMBER TWO stand was located in a small valley, just over the ridge from the settlement. He found L'Heureux and his group clearing the area to the left of the stand with their heat beams. They had already burned over at least three acres, and were pushing rapidly toward the low line of hills that ringed the valley. The work was apparently proceeding rather slowly. The rank moss that covered the ground seemed to hold out for an unprecedented number of minutes, before the beat of the beam brought its juices to a boil. Then the stuff shriveled suddenly and burst into glowing sparks, while a coil of oily black smoke oozed upward. The stuff burned with a resinous odor.

The ground at the edge of the stand was covered with a light, powdery grey ash. Alfred Cadis noticed that the ground between the patches of the moss was still moist. The heat beams were apparently being operated at just under the boiling point of water; yet the moss was burning, as if it contained some highly flammable internal resin.

He began to cut sections

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from the corn plants in the stand. The plants on the north side seemed much healthier than those he had observed the day before. Whatever the alien moss might be, it didn't seem to hurt the corn.

He pulled a pocket magnifier from the specimen kit, and examined a section of one of the healthier corn plants under its five-power magnification.

THE TISSUE along the rough cut looked healthy, but just under the layer of cellulose threads that supported the softer sap layers, he saw something. He tried for a smoother cut with a scapel from the kit.

Under the lens he saw that the sap layer was surrounded by glittering particals of something. For a moment, Cadis couldn't believe his eyes. The plant seemed perfectly healthy; yet, as he watched, the warmth of his hand penetrated the thin section he had sliced away from the larger stalk, and the tiny crystals began to melt.

Ice?

At sixty degrees?

He sniffed at the plant. There was only the faintly acrid odor of starchy sap.

He found a sprig of the alien moss holding to the bottom of one of the healthy plants and examined it. Under the ten-power magnification, mottled pigmented bodies sorted themselves. The purplish grey under the glass appeared a mixture of black, white, red, and blue bodies.

And each tiny cell-like body was surrounded with glittering pinpoints that melted as he watched.

He was just about to section another corn-plant when he heard a yell. Cadis rose to his feet and pushed rapidly through the corn into the open.

IN THE distance, he saw L'Heureux's group milling about. Several of the men had fallen to the ground, while the others tried to help them to their feet. The heat beams were still glowing; but as he watched, they flicked off one by one.

"Cadis," L'Heureux yelled from a distance.

"What is it?"

"Get help from the stockade. I got me some more blight cases."

He mounted the beetle and guided it back over the hill. As he approached the settlement, he saw that the streets of the small village were filled with people, all converging on the stockade. Dimly he could hear the screams of women and the swearing of men.

Most of the people had objects in their hands, and were striking wildly at the ground. As Cadis watched, a black flood separated itself from

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the group, and flowed along the ground away from the stockade.

The crowd turned and followed swiftly, striking at the tide of black.

Before he could stop the beetle, the tide was bearing down on him. The black wave was alive. From the mass came the sound of clicking mandibles, while a thousand tiny eyes glared at him as the rodent-like things bore down on the vehicle.

He knew that the beetle could not turn on time. If they overran him...

He tugged frantically at the control bar of the beetle as the black flood approached.

VIII

THEY WERE a black, undulating carpet, rolling toward him. Cadis had a brief moment to take in the details of some of the nearer animals; they were long and ferret-sleek, with broad flat muzzles and a row of white razor teeth—the sort that could strip the flesh from a man in seconds. Four clawed feet moved mincingly across the ground, speeding the sinuous bodies toward him.

He pulled frantically at the control bar, and the beetle turned abruptly. Something spat deep within the mechanism, and the dim whirr of the gyroscope within the machine died. The two-wheeled vehicle poised for an instant as though on a precipice. Then it was falling, throwing him forward and out of the cab. He landed on the hard ground in the bath of the wave of rodents.

He tried to scramble to his feet. He rolled to his knees and looked up to see death bearing down upon him. The borders of the wave were scarcely six feet from him as he pushed himself to his feet turned, stumbled, and fell flat before them.

He waited in silent terror for the end.

And the tide parted as it reached him.

IN WONDER Alfred Cadis saw the animals stream around his prone body, the living stream parting neatly to the right and left. For a moment he couldn't believe his own luck as they went past.

With sudden daring he stretched out his hand—and the flood altered its course.

He was wrestling with his shirt, in an instant peeling it from his back. Quickly he made it into an impromptu sack, tying the arms and using the drawstring on the front to close the collar. He saw that he would have little time left.

He made several clumsy passes. On his fifth try he bagged two, simultaneously. The small animals thrashed

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violently in their buckskin prison. And then the flood was past him, and one of the men from the settlement was helping him to his feet.

"For God's sake, what happened?" Cadis asked.

"The varmints came over the hill just like you saw," the man panted.

He saw that it was Eric, the one who hoped to be the father of the first child born to the settlement. "Any damage?"

"The generator," Eric said. "They stripped it clean again."

HE WAS TOO tired to care, when night came, that the long-promised lights in the compound would again be delayed. He and a detail of the men had brought back the stricken members of L'Heureux's party and Cadis had enlisted the help of Eric and L'Heureux in giving the antihistamine injections he'd found effective against the blight.

There were at least a dozen cases of the blight among the people in the settlement as well—including Mom Gaelmicha, who had been brought into the temporary hospital in a fitful coma.

He stood watching her massive form toss in delirium after he had administered the injection and shook his head.

"Never thought she'd get it," L'Heureux observed.

"Well, she'll pull through; it isn't likely to be fatal."

"First time for everything," L'Heureux said darkly.

Cadis placed the tray of syringes tiredly on a rude table. "Can you handle the rest?"

"Sure, but. . ."

"I want to have a look at the beasties I captured."

"I guess me and Eric can do for them," L'Heureux said grudgingly, as he looked toward the other side of the long room where Eric was finishing with the last of his assigned patients.

CADIS LEFT them and walked slowly across the darkened compound. New Glendale's swift little moon was winging across the sky, throwing dancing shadows before him as he walked.

He entered the lab, found the switch that activated the lab's power supply, and sighed as the walls glowed. At least there was some place in this insane settlement where things were familiar, and not ripped by the roots out of some madman's distorted imagination of what constituted past history.

A noise from the corner of the room broke his chain of thought. He walked over to the improvised cage in which he had imprisoned his "rats!" The cage was actually an empty packing case, over which he had weighted a metal grill from the inside of an incuba-

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tor. A sound of rapid scratching came from the box.

He bent forward to look into the shadowed interior. The first thing he thought of was walzing mice. Both rodents were turning in swift circles, as though trying to bite their tails. The tiny clawed feet made rapid scratching sounds on the wooden bottom of the case.

He drew the grill aside slowly, to get a better look. Both rodents ignored him; they circled rapidly in their pointless chase, endlessly traversing a circle of scarcely a foot in diameter. He started to reach in, to see if they would still avoid contact with him. Then he saw the gleam of razor teeth and thought better of it.

THERE WAS a muffle furnace against the far corner of the lab; hanging from its underside was a pair of thick gloves made from some heat-resistent plastic. Cadis walked over, pulled them from their hook, and donned them; then he went back to the cage. Neither animal had ceased his endless chase.

He reached in carefully. The animals ignored him as his gloved fingers closed on one. He lifted it carefully from the cage, while its feet made rapid churning motions and its body twisted as though it still paced its tiny circle.

He examined it at arms length. There seemed to be nothing wrong with the creature—no obvious injuries, at least. Why such behavior... as though something had happened to its motor nervous system. He brought it closer for a better look, realized he had been holding his breath, and exhaled with conscious effort.

The effect was so startling that he almost dropped the creature. As his breath hissed from his lungs, the twisting animal stopped its gyrations for a moment; then, slowly, it became rigid. Its whole body sagged, and in the next instant Cadis was holding a limp mass of bone and muscle. There was no doubt that the animal was dead.

Poisoned by a cloud of carbon dioxide?

No, he decided, as he pulled the gloves from his hands. There was an appreciable percentage of the gas in New Glendale's atmosphere. The animal was accustomed to breathing the stuff.

What then? A virus carried on his breath? That seemed hardly likely. Any microorganism would take a finite time in which to act. A virus didn't give you the flu in a matter of seconds, much less kill you.

What then?

HE LAID the small corpse on a table and brought out a dissecting kit. After some twenty minutes, he knew no more than when he had

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started. The internal organs were fairly simple. The creature seemed to be vaguely mammalian, hermaphroditic, and oviparous. There were a series of what appeared to be functioning mammary glands, two distinct sets of what he thought were gonads, which discharged into a common duct. There were several round egg-like objects developing in the duct. These held large embryos floating in sacs on a mass of protein material.

He found a simple three vesicle brain in the fore-skull and traced two parallel nerve cords down the dorsal surface. These periodically bulged in complex ganglia, which in turn radiated filament-like nerves of greenish tissue to the periphery of the body. Under the magnifying lenses of the dissecting stage, the nervous tissue was limp and flaccid—as though extensive autolysis had already begun to degrade the cell structure.

Cadis took several sections from one of the large ganglia and examined it under the optical microscope. The lumpish-looking cells were in wild chaos. Cell walls had collapsed, and the cytoplasm of the cells was a confused mass of undifferentiated material. There were a number of intact cells, but these looked as if they had been dipped in alcohol; their membranes were indented and withered-looking. Without the use of a stain, he couldn't make out too many of the more intimate details of the cells; but he was quite sure that the material in the intact cells was not appreciably disturbed.

It was as if a host of small ice crystals had formed between each individual cell, expanded, and imploded the cells of the creature.

HE TOOK fresh sections from viscera, muscles, and connective tissue. These seemed in perfect condition, there was no sign of degeneration of the cell structure.

Carefully he donned the insulating gloves again and secured a scapel and a set of forceps. These he chilled briefly in the freezing chest; then he secured the second animal from its cage. The creature was still revolving ceaselessly, as though its energy were inexhaustible.

There was no time for the nicieties; besides his technique had never been too good with small animals in college. Cadis secured the section of muscle and nerve from the beast and prepared it on a chilled slide. The rodent continued its endless gyrations in the improvised cage, heedless of the flow of ichor streaming from the wound in its rear leg.

Under the microscope, details were fuzzy. Fluid suffused the tissues of the muscles and the contained nerves. But there was no doubt about

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the important feature, the one he had expected to see.

Grouped around one large ganglion, a thin layering of crystals gleamed in the light. As he turned the micrometer adjustments of the mechanical stage, he saw that the same crystalline material coated the nerves running from the ganglion.

He returned the ganglion to the center of view and inspected it closely, under higher magnification. He adjusted the iris diaphragm and switched to polarized light.

WELL, THAT knocked his theory into a cocked hat. The crystals weren't hexagonal; they were roughly cubical. That meant that the substance wasn't ice. As Cadis watched, the crystals were indeed melting. He'd been careful to interpose a cooling cell before the substage light of the microscope, but as the temperature of the slide rose, the crystals began to melt. He'd purposely kept the room temperature at the prevailing temperature outside. Yet, the slight increase from the substage lamp was destroying the crystal structure around the nerve strands.

No wonder the first animal had died. The slight *heat* of his breath had been sufficient to destroy the crystal sheath that was apparently necessary to the animal's life.

He was wondering what analogy could be drawn between this and the crystalling substances he'd found in the corn plants when a knock sounded on the door.

It was Sue Milstadt. "Anyone here?" she asked.

"No, but..."

She pushed past him and closed the door.

"You'd better not let Mom Gaelmicha find you here," he said, retreating behind a lab table.

"Mom Gaelmicha's dead o' the blight."

For a moment he was too stunned to speak.

"The important thing we have to discuss, Mr. Cadis," Sue said crisply, "is what you've accomplished to date. We didn't spend the taxpayers money to send you out here solely to toy with young maidens and their affections."

Alfred Cadis stared at her. "Oh, good heavens! Not you, too?"

IX

BACHELOR'S HALL was cold and empty and he could not sleep. Cadis burrowed his head under the heavy coverlets and tried to drown thoughts in an endless chant of counting, repeating auto-suggestions of sleep, but no sleep came.

The death of Mom Gaelmicha had been unsettling, even if it had removed a source of embarrassment. He had liked the big, ponderous woman—had, in fact, felt almost filial

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toward her, recognizing in her the same rock-hard strength that his own mother had possessed.

At least he'd felt that way up until she had started to act like some adolescent swaytail.

And now Sue Milstadt.

It reminded him of one of those Martian farces where everyone turned out to be a spy of the Venusian underground, each spying on the other and unaware of the other's identity. The Colonial Bureau, Cadis decided, must be buried under its own red tape to assign two independent agents to the settlement and not let either be aware of the other.

IN THE DISTANCE, he could hear sounds of shouting. That crazy Tennat, he thought, out with his crews this time of night. They'd rigged up a series of pressure tanks together with a large alcohol reservoir and with the improvised flame-thrower, Tennat proposed to destroy all of the alien moss encroaching on his corn.

"That heathen stuff is the cause of all our misery," Tennat had declared after Cadis briefed him on what he'd discovered in the lab.

Well, what did you do with a fanatic like that? Let the others lose their sleep burning out the moss growths. Cadis yawned under the coverlets and tumbled sleepily, deafening his ears to the distant noise...

The night stretched endlessly on and it was cold and the cold was heavy on his limbs... And pleasant... Like the caress of a soft hand, a distant hand that was...

No longer distant!

The touch on his arm and his face was gentle, and dreamily he looked into her white face.

SHE WAS bending over the bed and, although it was totally dark in the room, her white form was quite clear. Full snowy bosoms and chalk white swelling limbs...and a face both strong and gentle... Like the faces of the women of his dreams.

Like... There was a haunting feeling of familiarity in the cold strength of the jaw, the purposeful eyes.

Cadis reached up and touched her flesh. For a moment she shivered and drew back; he saw the mark of his hand, as though the heat of his touch had melted a clear imprint in the flesh.

"What...who..." he stammered.

She touched her fingers to her lips and started to move toward the door.

"Wait," he said.

She beckoned, moved closer and then moved away again.

His whole body was suddenly tense with longing. He'd never experienced such a yearning before in the tight,

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controlled emotionality of his life.

He was pushing from the bed, trying to move toward the ghostly shape while an inner force clutched at him, pulled him back.

And his whole body was on fire...

He fell to the bed, writhing in agony as...

Agony! Terrible, unbearable agony! Like acid on raw nerve endings. It raced through his system, its fire for an instant paralyzing whole sections of his brain.

ALFRED CADIS twisted in violent spasms, as convulsive messages traced fiery paths along his raw nerves. If he could have withdrawn, he would have done so; but no motor reflex he had ever developed could deal with the source of his agony.

The pain was all-consuming, drowning rational thought in its searing flood. His brain throbbed with the pulsations of his tortured nervous system and the creations of his mind trembled and shattered into glistening shards.

The source of the pain was vulnerable, but barely. It could not be destroyed. He could surround it (he?) with a potion of his being, envelop it with his great substance (his?), encyst it with his vast being as a focus of infection (His being? Vast and girdling?) is sealed away by layer on layer of cornified tissue.

Or failing that, consume his own vast substance (vast? Who was he? Cadis? Being?) and destroy, utterly...

His lungs ached with the force of his screams. Cadis shook his head violently, fighting the wave of pain that had possessed him. Then he fell back, exhausted, feeling the strength draining back into his limbs.

For an instant, he had been ripped from the room, from all familiar surroundings and hurled into some vast cauldron of fire.

Then he remembered the woman of white and he pushed his weakened body from the bed. His bare feet touched the cold floor. He shivered and began to pull on his clothing.

HE STUMBLED through the dark toward the door. Outside the dark ranks of corn marched away from the bachelor's hall. Was that a white shape he saw flitting through the stand?

No, only his imagination.

He was a little frightened at the depths of feeling he'd experienced for an instant when the woman had appeared.

Or had it been only a too-real dream, a white thing twisted from his thoughts, shaped by the talk of the day, summoned by desires and wants hidden deep within his

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mind where he'd pressed them throughout the years.

He was suddenly very much afraid. He felt a little like crying, as though he could revert to the small boy he had been years before; as though again that great strong hand could gather him in to the massive bosom and tender words soothe away all cares and...

My God, he thought, what's *happening to me?*

He heard the sound of someone moving through the dark, and a shadowed shape turned the corner of the building. He straightened, with an effort of will.

"CADIS?"

It was L'Heureux's voice.

"Yes?"

"It's happened again?"

"The blight?"

"That's right."

"To the men manning Tennat's flamethrower party?"

"How...?"

"Never mind, how; I think I'm beginning to see some sense in this."

"Well," L'Heureux said in the crisp tone Cadis dreaded, "this thing is past equivocation. Your theories had better prove correct or the settlement is finished."

"I presume," Cadis said tiredly, "that you were sent out by the Colonial Bureau to spy on this group?"

"Observe and report," L'Heureux corrected, punctuating his words with a stream of tobacco.

"And Nettie?"

He could imagine L'Heureux's shrug in the dark. "What else?"

X

THEY HAD to use Bachelor Hall as an emergency hospital. Cadis wasn't too disappointed as they moved his gear from the barn-like building and moved in the bedding and patients. His major concern at the moment was the supply of anti-histamine on hand. He'd used their supply of Cardatron and had switched to its methyl ester derivative, but now even this material was running low.

And before the hour was out, they had their second death and then their third.

After he had done what he could, he left the hall, and walked to the stockade. He found Tennat and L'Heureux in the Mayor's quarters at the far end of the compound. The Mayor looked very tired.

Cadis told them what had happened.

"It seems impossible." Tennat shook his head.

"Devil's work sure," L'Heureux said.

"We'll destroy every bit of that hell-weed, if we have to blast it out," Tennat cried, with sudden vehemence.

"That," Alfred Cadis said,

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"is exactly what you will *not* do."

The Mayor stiffened and started to speak.

"Haven't you made the association by now? Every time one of your weeding crews goes out, we have an outbreak of the blight. I imagine if you check back, you'll find that your early cases of the blight involved some such weeding activities, either by a crew or by individuals."

"You ain't trying to say them weeds is responsible for the blight?" L'Heureux asked.

"Maybe. I don't know yet."

The Mayor shook his head. That would be hard to believe. How could a mere plant cause such distress?"

"By airborne spores, by some vapor it exudes. Who knows."

"But," the Mayor protested "that's all the more reason for destroying the weeds."

"Only, not until we know how to protect ourselves," Cadis said.

HE AND L'HEUREUX left the Mayor and threaded their way through the darkened compound to the laboratory.

"This is the one bright thing about coming to New Glendale," Cadis said, as the ceiling panels glowed. "At least there's light here."

"Huh," growled L'Heureux, "you ain't got the pioneer spirit."

"You are so right."

"What about this airborne spore theory?"

"Do you *believe* it?"

"Huh, uh," L'Heureux said.

"Neither do I. We're up against something a lot more subtle than that. This thing seems to have certain elements of pattern in it, a certain feel of... well, direction."

"Well, we just can't sit on our fannies and let the blight chase us off New Glendale."

"We may do just that. Of course, one way or another, your job will be finished here."

"Well, now," L'Heureux said, "I was toying with the idea of staying. Actually it isn't a bad world."

"Even with this bunch of madmen running it?"

"I don't think that's too fair," L'Heureux said. "Lots of the settlers don't hold with Tennat's ideas, but they're willing to go along with the idea for a chance at a new world."

"Like Sue Milstadt, maybe?"

"Well sure. She's a good example of the adventuresome sort. There's lots of women these days with a streak of independence."

Cadis told him of Sue's real position in the settlement.

"Well, I'll be damned."

"How long have you been with the Colonial Bureau?"

L'Heureux said, "To tell you the truth, this is my first assignment."

"And Nettie?"

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"Same way. She's my real daughter, by the way."

"CHECK ME if I'm wrong: You were a freighter skipper, or something similar?"

"Right."

"Unemployed?"

"Well, now, I wouldn't say..."

"And they recruited you with this assignment in mind, probably sent you through a period of hypno-training."

"You've been reading the book."

"With minor changes, that could read like Sue's story."

"So?"

"I've got a theory; tell you more tomorrow. In the meantime, do you have any sort of scout ship aboard the *Hope?*"

"Only the life craft, the flitters, but they maneuver pretty well in an atmosphere if you don't try to crowd them."

"Let's you and me take one out tomorrow."

"Where?"

"Like to take a flight north, look over the ocean areas; just prowl."

"Seems like damned foolishness."

"I told you I had a theory."

They discussed final details and Cadis started to leave. "Damp the pile before you go," he called back.

"See you don't fret yourself, sonny," L'Heureux called after him, the reassumed New Glendale accent ironically overaccented.

HOW DO YOU cope with something like this, Cadis wondered as he passed through the gate of the stockade. An alien world with an unknown menace, and a group of eccentrics headed by a Mayor as mad as a hatter. And to make life even more complicated, a collosal bureaucratic snafu that dumped four agents from the same department into the settlement, completely unaware of each other.

With the exception of L'Heureux and his daughter, he corrected himself. Now that seemed rather odd. Surely, the Bureau could have picked agents with more ability and guile than those two; it didn't make sense. Granted, as with any large organization, the Bureau had its share of administrative duplication, still there were some shrewd men heading it; and New Glendale was a large-scale operation in terms of its far-reaching consequences.

Item: L'Heureux and Sue were both on their first assignment. What if the same had been true of Mom Gaelmicha? Was it possible that the Colonial Bureau could be so naive as to pick a group of agents at random from the population at large, give them only the most sketchy of orientations, and then depend upon them for the detailed

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specialized information necessary to a proper evaluation of the defiant culture of New Glendale?

HE FOLLOWED the darkened settlement street to Bachelor's Hall, intending to pick up his bedding where the emergency crews had piled it in one corner of the great room—after the patients from the latest outbreak of the blight had been moved in.

This was the first moment he'd had for a full realization of the events of the day and he felt a dark loneliness settling on his mind. He'd never felt so removed, so divorced from friends. Cadis was not the type of man who makes friends easily; but he still needed some sense of belonging, some identification with his fellows to exist. The loss of Mom Gaelmicha weighed upon him. He could not understand the peculiar attraction her great strength had for him, and he knew that properly he should have little fondness for the memory of that mountain for a woman after...

But really, what wrong had she done?

He stood on the crude porch of Bachelor Hall and gazed out over the stand of corn stretching away under the soft light of the moon. The valley rolled upward, as if approached the foothills at the base of the mountains, and he could see the endless tossing tassles of the plants blending together into a dim frothy landscape, like a forgotten sea on some incredibly alien world.

He could even see...

He stepped from the porch and pushed his way through the corn, his blind feet snagging in exposed roots. Ahead he saw again that quick flash of white, and...

THERE WAS no doubt of it this time. Alfred Cadis was not dreaming, and the white form was too suggestive of the reality for him to doubt what it was. A kind of insanity seemed to seize him; and he began to run wildly through the narrow rows. His breath came in heavy gulps as the sharp leaves of the corn lashed and cut his face.

The only thing he knew at the moment was that what ever lay ahead was most desirable, what he had wanted all his life. Desirable...yet unpossessible. Chaste beyond the chasteness possible to anything of earth.

He caught a quick, exciting glimpse of the white form; and then a hurried toe caught on an exposed corn root. He fell in a tangle of broken stalks, his face driving violently into the soft cool ground.

He must have lain there for the better part of an hour, his chest heaving for air, while

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thought and reason slowly returned. Finally he rose to his feet and made his way back through the corn to the hall. Inside, he found Eric dozing in a chair near the door while two of the settlement women at the far end of the hall sat near a lantern and spoke in low tones. Several of the men on the pallets on the floor tossed fitfully in the delirium compounded of drugs and the after-effects of the blight.

"Uh," Eric said when he brushed past him quietly and began to secure his bedding from the corner of the room.

"Any further trouble?" Cadis asked.

"Nothing here," Eric said softly. "Most sleeping like babes."

"I'm bedding down outside if you need me," Cadis said.

"It's cold out there. Why not throw down a pallet in here."

"Air's fresher." Then he had a thought. "How's the wife?"

Eric beamed proudly. "Any day now."

"Does she know you're an agent for the Colonial Bureau?"

Eric righted his chair with a clatter; the noise brought a disapproving hiss from one of the women at the far end of the hall. "How the blazes did you find that out?"

"It figures," Cadis said and walked from the building.

XI

HE COULDN'T say exactly what impulse drove him to sleep on the porch, rather than to find a temporary billet with one of the families in the settlement. Perhaps it was the chance to see the white visitor again; but there seemed a much deeper compulsion than that. Alfred Cadis was afraid to admit it, but it wasn't really a matter of choice.

He had to.

He slept poorly, and every strange noise in the night—the rustle of the corn in some errant breeze, the creaking of the porch under his shifting weight, the faint mutter of conversation from inside the building—brought him instantly awake.

When he finally did sleep, his dreams were filled with shapeless fantasies. He dreamed again about exotic pursuit across the red sands of Varoom, but Gal-douch wore the face of Tennat, shifting into the face of L'Heureux and then into Cadis' long-dead father. Leja Loris, her trembling body clasped in his, seemed to become a being of snow that melted in the heat of his embrace. Only a diaphanous sketch of a face remained as her body became vapor—A face that hung in the morning light and flowed into the grinning features of Mom Gaelmicha.

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AFTER THAT, he was aware of a voice that talked to him and pleaded with him; there was the distant image of the woman of white with full breasts and cold arms outstretched. But he knew that those arms could not hold him, that the heat of his embrace would destroy her. She was like a statue of alabaster or...better still...of ice, recipient of love and tenderness and loyalty, but immaculate...forever immaculate...

As all the distant women in his life should have been. Capable of love that should be denied, but could be voiced only because the barrier between them made her untouchable...

Somehow he was horrified at the thought, and yet...

What did it matter to him, who was not human? Who was quite apart from humanity, and understood only dimly. There was a part of him that had absorbed the object of desire, used it as a tailor uses a pattern of measurements to tailor cloth, but...

Well, that was mere seeking for survival, the desire in some fashion to remove the menace to his existence...

And he...she...they came through the darkness of dreams and for the first time he said what he had always wanted to say

"I love you," he said; it was very easy, for there was no barrier to the words, no thought of extending the idea to its logical, dreaded fulfillment...

For there was no choice. The barrier was not one of training, of psychological conditioning. The choice was simple and physical and immediate. Immaculateness or non-existence...

Which was the way, Cadis told the white woman who looked and yet did not look like Mom Gaelmicha, was the way he had always wanted it.

And he was wide-awake and shivering in the early morning light, and very disturbed.

HE SOUGHT out L'Heureux after breakfast, his mind still struggling through the layers of unreality that had possessed it during the night.

"What's wrong?" L'Heureux demanded. "You look like you seen a ghost."

"Perhaps I have."

What was a ghost? he thought. The surviving pattern after death. Blended of the emotional reactions of the viewer and the essence of the viewed?

Lord, is this the thing that has lain in my mind for years, and...

Madness...? Was there a way...?

They went to the *Hope* and readied one of the flitters. L'Heureux suggested that they could use the launching tubes of the big ship, rather

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than trying to crane the craft down to the ground.

Cadis very nearly lost his breakfast when the launching tube catapulted them into the morning air with a blast of air. The craft dropped heavily for a second, and then the jets caught. In seconds, the stockade, the regular rows of houses, and the green cornfields of the settlement dropped away below them.

After they had breasted the low mountains that surrounded the New Glendale settlement, they passed over broad plains solidly carpeted by the grey-blue moss. As far as the eye could see, it spread into the horizon with an achingly smooth texture from their height. Occasionally, they passed over swarms of the rodent-like creatures which had attacked the settlement. The sound of their passage did not seem to disturb the animals.

"NOTICE anything unusual?" Cadis asked L'Heureux above the whistle of the jets.

"Nope."

"On any normal planet, you'd expect to see a great number of life forms—both plants and animals."

"So?"

"So far, we've seen exactly one species of plant, and one species of animal; that's unprecedented."

"That what you wanted to find out?"

"No. Let's keep going."

They had been flying roughly west. He gave L'Heureux directions to find the coast line of the land mass over which they flew and to follow it north.

To be truthful, Cadis admitted to himself, he did not know exactly for what he was looking. There certainly must be some clue to the concerted attack of the animals and the moss upon New Glendale. He began to wonder if, perhaps, they were not dealing with some sort of planet-wide empathy between the animals and the moss plant, a common attempt of the two to rid the planet of its unwanted visitors.

They were passing over a small, winding river when something attracted Cadis' attention. He signaled L'Heureux to drop lower.

For a moment, his breath halted in his throat at the sheer brilliance of the colors below. What had appeared from a high altitude to be a heavy tinge of ochre on the surface of the river became an astonishing slash of bright crimson threading its way through the center of the river. It was as if an artist had painted a dreary river scene of flat plains and colorless water and then, in sheer disgust at the montony, had dipped his coarsest brush in alizarin crimson and raked it savagely through the shoddy stream.

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THEY MADE a second pass back at barely a hundred yards altitude and he saw that the colors did not separate. The swirling line of red remained homogeneous.

"What do you think it is?" L'Heureux asked.

"The first survey maps showed it," Cadis said. "I think they were probably right; they thought it was algae."

"Look at the ice."

The stream was glinting in the bright sun with the brilliance of a myriad facets. It was literally swollen with ice—not large chunks, as though an solid covering over the river had recently melted and broken apart; this ice, rather, was a fine, almost pasty sludge that swirled like thick syrup through the water. There was something suggestive of life in the way the pattern changed, turned in on itself, and moved slowly down stream.

Ice? he thought.

Ice at sixty degrees?

He looked astern at the swirling colors, then saw that the color had altered. A strip of dirty red—the color of clotted blood—divided the bright red of the algae. For a moment, he didn't make the connection; then he realized that the long strip of darker red paralleled their course as they flew above the stream.

Even as he watched, the trailing end of the dark red streak faded into the brighter red. Could the heat of their passage cause such a change?

He punched L'Heureux on the shoulder. "Get some altitude and then make a low angle pass," he ordered. "Cut out your jets as soon as you have enough speed to carry you."

L'Heureux grunted acknowledgement.

THEY TURNED, gained altitude, and began a swift decent. On the upswing, L'Heureux cut the jets and Cadis watched as the dark streak on the water continued to follow them; it paced the swift shadow of their craft on the water.

He had never heard of a plant being as light-sensitive as that, Cadis thought. The algae seemed to be absorbing the energy of New Glendale's sun so fast that the momentary loss of its energy produced the rapid darkening of the crimson color. The clotted-blood color, he decided, must be the reduced form of whatever pigment the plant used to carry on its photosynthetic activities.

Only...of what possible use could so much energy be to a simple plant?

Unless the idea that was beginning to form in his mind was... But that was ridiculous.

An hour later, they came within sight of the coastline. The grey-blue moss persisted to the very water's edge. The

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vast ocean that stretched to the horizon was a mottled grey and green, with vast swathes of crimson riding on its surface. Only here the crimson masses were in even more pronounced motion.

The surface of the sea was a slurry of fine crystals as far as the eye could see, and the great masses of crimson algae dyed the ice a brilliant red. The masses of algae swirled with a restless motion, disappearing from the surface and boiling up again as though carried on slow currents that rose from the ocean floor.

The effect was somehow frightening and yet fascinating. It was like watching the flow of arterial blood under a microscope, seeing the heavy corpuscles tumble through tiny capillary networks in living tissue.

He was watching the surface intently and as the thought of comparing the movement to the flow of blood occurred to him, the red algae seemed to organize itself in one area into discrete disk-shaped areas and flow in a narrow stream outward to a point where it disappeared beneath the surface of the ocean.

Tentatively, he thought: *flow left...branch...*

And the particular stream he was watching turned sharply to his left and then divided into two streams.

The flitter passed over the stream, and the bright red faded. In the next instant the stream lost definition and became again a disorganized patch of color swirling in the ocean of ice.

"That's enough," he told L'Heureux. "Let's get back."

XII

"YOU'RE completely mad," Mayor Tennat said.

"Am I?" Cadis demanded. "I can prove it easily enough."

"I won't have such blasphemy in New Glendale."

"I'd suggest you drop that pose, too."

"We've found you out, Mayor," L'Heureux said, grinning thrugh yellowed whiskers.

"New Glendale is a complete farce," Cadis added.

"No," Tennat said worriedly. "No, that isn't true."

"Do you deny that you were commissioned by the Colonial Bureau to set up this phoney back-to-the-good-old-days movement, to attract malcontents for the colony on New Glendale?"

Tennat's face dropped. "I don't know how you found that out," he said, "but, please ...I mean, if you can be discreet..."

L'Heureux began to laugh. "He's been had the same way as the rest of us."

"What do you mean?" the Mayor demanded.

"He means," Cadis said, "that every member of the

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New Glendale settlement was contacted by the Colonial Bureau and assigned the job of spying on this colony to see that it didn't develop into a schizoid culture."

"But that's utter nonsense."

"Is it? How else can the Bureau get a bunch of malcontents working together toward one end. Each man and woman in the colony has been content to quietly work for the growth of the settlement because he thought he had no permanent interest in it. Yet each one received hypno-conditioning to integrate himself into the settlement life gradually, to the point that he wouldn't want to return."

"In short," L'Heureux laughed, "this whole crazy setup—even the backwoods accent they taught us—is a part of the Bureau's attempt to reproduce a pioneer settlement compounded of malcontents and whacks."

TENNAT shook his head.

"Face it, Mayor," L'Heureux said; "we've been took."

"But the blight, and the rats, and the rest?"

"Well, that's something they didn't anticipate."

"And there's more there than meets the eye," L'Heureux said.

"But..."

Cadis outlined what he had found.

"But it still doesn't make sense, none of it. The disappearance of the men from the settlement; the ice that you say can't exist—especially in the tissue of living things."

"Oh, there's precedent for it," Cadis said. "I remember an inorganic course in college, where they mentioned the existance of hydrates—combinations of water with nearly-insoluble materials like methane or carbon tetrachloride to form substances that freeze at higher temperatures."

"But there's no such substance on New Glendale," Tennat objected.

"YES, THERE is. The original atmospheric analysis lists an unidentified hydrocarbon. As for the formation of ice in living tissue, the reactive groups of animal and vegetable proteins can serve the same purpose. That's where the hydrate could form there, at the interphase of a protein molecule and the fluids surrounding it."

"But that still doesn't explain any of our troubles."

"Let's go over to Locksley Hall. If what I believe is true, we should be able to test the theory with one of the blight patients."

"No," Tennat said, "I can't have that."

"You want to find out the truth, don't you?"

"Yes, but..."

"Then, come on."

Cadis walked from the mayor's office into the stockade compound and started toward

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the gates, the Mayor and L'Heureux bringing up the rear. He watched the guard open the side door and wondered if the man still thought he was the only agent of the Colonial Bureau in the settlement. It was very possible, since the ones he'd unmasked so far weren't likely to start comparing notes.

He moved purposefully down toward the settlement. It was rather amazing, he thought, the way the whole destiny of the colony had suddenly devolved upon him. All of his life, he had been content to be the follower of a more forceful personality, assuming that the gift for leadership was some God-given attribute reserved for a chosen few. It was not a little startling, and certainly rather fascinating, to discover that men—even men like L'Heureux and Eric and Tennat—would instinctively follow someone who acted positively.

Perhaps that had been the whole problem in his relationship with the other men in the Agronomy section, a simple inability to put his best foot forward with the required agressiveness. His whole life had been a parade of vacillation and indecision and now...

"What are you up to?" L'Heureux whispered as he caught up with Cadis.

"Never mind. You'll see."

THEY FOUND Sue Milstadt on duty in the improvised hospital. There were only five pallets remaining on the floor and all of the men were sleeping soundly.

"What happened to the rest?" Cadis asked.

"Five we moved back into the main dispensery," she said. "Two were all right this morning. The rest..."

Her tired sigh was more eloquent than any statement of fact.

Cadis walked to the medical kit on the table behind her, and secured a pressure syringe and two ampoules.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"Which one of your patients has been under sedation the longest?"

"Frank Bark, I think. She led them over to a pallet some distance removed from the other four.

Cadis had thought the name sounded familiar. It was the big redhead who'd first taunted him in the dining room about the campaign to end his bachelorhood. Bark's face was white and cold-looking now, with no trace of his former ruddy complexion. As they stood over him, he moaned and turned in his sleep.

"Here, pull up his sleeve," Cadis said.

As soon as Sue had done so, he pressed the syringe against the arm and released a cloud of nupamine from the syringe.

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The stimulant penetrated the arm and spread into the man's system quickly. In moments he began to roll his head, and breathe more rapidly. His lids fluttered, and he wetted his lips painfully.

At this point, Cadis injected the hypnotic in the second ampoule.

FOR LONG moments they waited as the drug fought the effect of the earlier stimulant. Bark groaned softly and lay breathing deeply.

"Bark," Cadis said quietly, "can you hear me?"

"Yes." The voice sounded distant, far removed from the room.

"Where are you?"

"Here." The tone was faintly petulant.

"Yes, but you're someplace else, too."

"Leave me alone," the man moaned.

"Stop it!" Tennat grabbed Cadis' arm. "What are you trying to do."

Cadis shook the hand aside.

"Where are you?"

"All places...everywhere. The sea, creeping across the land...seeing through tiny eyes, growing into the deep earth...the plains...seeing ...living..."

"Why do you want to harm us?"

"Because...hurt..pain every time."

"We can hurt you much worse," Cadis said.

"No."

The man's voice changed. It thickened to a throaty rumble. For seconds the words were incoherent. Then...

"No, you can't do that, because your world and mine exists because of me," the voice said.

"My heavens," Tennat whispered, "do you hear that?"

"Alby, Alby," the voice said. "There's so much here for you. Why destroy it and all that it could mean to..."

My God, Cadis thought, *no one has called me Alby since...*

"Stay out of my mind," he yelled at the man on the pallet. "Keep your filthy hands out of my mind."

"Alby," the voice sobbed, *"everything you've ever wanted. Only...only...don't get old and bitter now, Alby."*

He pushed his way through the group about Bark, his throat hot and swollen with a mixture of desire and revulsion.

"My God," he heard L'Heureux say, "it's her, sure as sin."

Sue was staring wide-eyed at the face of the man on the pallet. "It was Mom Gaelmicha's voice."

"But that can't be," Tennat objected.

XIII

ERIC WHARTON'S son was born that night.

It was the first child ever to be born in the New Glendale settlement. It would

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have been better for the child, and for the Whartons, if it had died in delivery.

"The thing is all around us," L'Heureux growled.

"It's trying to change us to suit its own purposes," Cadis said tiredly.

He looked around the Mayor's small office, seeing the tired expression of defeat in Tennat's eyes; watching the way the lamp's flickering yellow light played on the cold features of L'Heureux; seeing the mixed fear and lack of understanding in the faces of the two girls, Nettie and Sue.

"How can a thing like that exist?" Tennat said.

"By the nature of the hydrates that compose it, I suppose. When water crystallizes, it forms a lattice that's hexagonal in cross-section."

"Like snowflakes?" L'Heureux asked.

"That's right. The hexagonal crystal is under strain; it has to lose a lot of energy to remain stable. But the hydrate crystal is in the same collapsed state as liquid water; it's cubical in nature. The big molecule in the center of the water molecules forms the hydrate and adsorbs energy in the process. That's why water under these conditions can freeze so far about normal freezing point."

"And both the hydrate crystal and normal ice could exist side by side at those temperatures?"

"Rather like Maxwell's demon on a grand scale," Cadis said. "The overall temperature would still be in the sixties."

"But a thing...a thinking animal made of ice," Nettie said.

"THAT'S EXACTLY what we have to contend with," Cadis said. "They've used the phenomenon in low temperature computors before. The system can store binary impulses, the ice crystal and the hydrate crystal being the two poles of the system. In a way, the whole system is like a mass of unorganized diodes. Don't ask me how this thing first came into existance, but you've got to face it. Every drop of water on New Glendale...the seas, the tissues of the moss and now the corn, the nervous tissues of the things you called rats...every molecule of water is capable of entering into the complex. The seas and the algae we found furnish its energy, and the moss your men tried to kill are a part of its body."

"But it's vulnerable," Tennat said. "We've demonstrated that."

"And so are we. The thing is changing the corn, incorporating the corn into its being, and is trying to change other things...including us."

"It can't do that," Tennat said; "it can't change the given form of man."

"It doesn't have to," Cadis

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said. "You saw the Wharton baby—humanoid, but not human any longer. The men with the blight were changed; their nervous systems were brought under the control of this thing to such an extent that, when you destroyed part of its substance, they reacted empathetically by collapsing, and even dying."

"But that means," L'Heureux said, "that anyone who's had even a touch of the blight, and survived, is in some way under the influence of this thing."

"Yes," Alfred Cadis said, remembering the thing he had yet to do, the consumation of his search.

"There's only one thing you can do; you have to leave. New Glendale is finished."

He left them, sitting in silence and went down through the settlement to Bachelor Hall. They'd removed the remaining blight patients to other quarters and he had the barn-like structure to himself again. He found his bedding and carried it out on the porch. Then he lay down and pretended to sleep.

HE WAS STILL quite awake when she came from the cover of the corn. She crossed the short distance to the porch and stood looking down at him. He waited breathlessly for her to move.

He was aware of the utter whiteness of her body, of the cold, smooth breasts, and white thighs, the cold and distant beauty of the woman.

An inhuman beauty. A dream-like untouchable beauty.

She started to move from the porch, and he was on his feet in an instant. "Wait," he called.

She stopped for a second, like a startled fawn sniffing the air; then she was running across the ground toward the stand of corn, white limbs flashing with the faint glint of ice.

"You'll come back," he called to her. "You have to, now that I know what you are."

The face that looked back for an instant was one compounded of dream-vision, and yet familiar—the blended features of those he had expected to see. She smiled coldly; for an instant, the air stirred about his ears, and the words whispered, "Soon, love."

In the next instant she screamed.

The sky in the west became a stark white with a brilliance that rivaled the noon sun. He was half-blinded for an instant. When he could see again, she was gone.

HE TURNED and ran through the streets of the settlement, sobbing his fury. How could the fool do such a thing? He ran up the slope to the stockade. The doors were closed; he pound-

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ed on the entrance gate, sobbing hysterically.

The utter idiot. He had destroyed everything.

A heavy wind was blowing from the west now, whipping at his garments. The wind was cold, colder than anything he had yet felt on New Glendale.

The entrance gate flew open and he pushed the guard aside. The wind whipped through his hair as he ran for the Mayor's quarters Overhead, lightning flickered tentatively, and the distant hiss of an approaching flitter cut the noise of the wind.

He found L'Heureux and Tennat by the door to the Mayor's quarters. "You idiot," he yelled, "what have you done?"

"Bombed the beast," Tennat said. "What we should have done in the first place. Killed it."

"The ice being?" he yelled. "You've solved your problems all right. He was the one thing that stabilized the climate on this crazy world."

"What do you mean?" L'Heureux demanded.

"It was he who created this even climate of yours; he can't exist without it. Even if you haven't killed him, you've wrecked New Glendale for any further colonization."

"We tried to teach him a lesson," L'Heureux said. "You can't kill anything that large."

"No," Cadis said, "but you can make him awfully mad."

LIGHTNING began to blast overhead and the wind whipped through the compound. Even as they watched, heavy clouds formed against the morning glow on the horizon.

"What can we do?" Tennat yelled against the wind.

"Mayor," Nettie L'Heureux called from the gate. "Get Cadis down to the settlement. It's terrible."

Cadis grabbed Tennat by the arm, his fingers biting in fiercely. He waved his hand at the slim shape of the *Hope*, towering above the plain north of the settlement. Lightning was flashing around her gleaming nose.

"There's your only answer," he yelled. "If you act fast enough to save what you still have."

Then it began to snow.

By the time the people of New Glendale had gathered their few belongings together, and hurried toward the *Hope*, snow was falling in great wind-driven clouds.

Cadis stood, watching the last group carry a bundle of equipment toward the *Hope*.

L'Heureux passed him and stopped. "Come on," he yelled above the wind.

"Listen," Cadis yelled.

There was a distant rumbling and the ground shook slightly under them.

"Earthquakes next in order," Cadis yelled. He laughed and pointed at the ground. "Ice expanding in

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the geological faults; he'll get you yet."

"Come on," L'Heureux yelled again.

He shook his head.

L'Heureux paused for a moment as though he were debating force. Finally he shrugged, spat a thin stream of yellow juice into the snow, and began to run as the ground rumbled again.

Cadis stood in the settlement street, waiting.

AFTER A WHILE, he saw her coming—a moving blob of white against the softer white of the drifting snow. He heard the jets of the *Hope* begin to throb in warm-up.

Then he was running toward her.

He found her standing, her arms outstretched, a wide-eyed expression of anticipation on her cold face. She looked like Leja Loris now—though later, he knew, she would look like a dozen others.

Object of love. Untouchable. Frozen in white purity, immaculate.

He turned and ran into one of the houses lining the street. A lamp still burned on the top of an abandoned chest of drawers. He picked it up and hurled it to the floor; flames flickered and raced across the floor.

He turned and kicked at one of the drawers from the chest. One large stick he drenched in the blazing oil on the floor and then he ran from the burning house.

In minutes all the houses surrounding the white figure in the street were blazing.

With a shuddering roar, the *Hope* became airborn. Cadis watched it rise slowly above the line of blazing houses and then gain speed.

It raced toward the brooding clouds overhead.

He brandished his torch at the fleeing ship and laughed.

They were all fools, he thought; fools, fleeing reality.

He looked at his white woman, his ice woman standing in the street, her cold features a fiery red as New Glendale blazed about them.

Alfred Cadis stood, waiting for his woman of ice to thaw.

An Off-Trail Story by *Thomas N. Scortia*
"A WALK IN THE SNOW"
is but one of the many superfine features in the BIG August issue of
SCIENCE FICTION QUARTERLY

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HIS HEAD IN THE CLOUDS

by Calvin M. Knox

illustrated by EMSH

There was hell to pay at the spaceport when a private ship took off while its pilot was still on the ground. No one had been near the craft except a 14 year old kid, and a teen-ager couldn't handle a space ship? Or could he?

IT WAS A quiet morning at Long Island Spaceport. The *Queen Henrietta* was due in from Mars at 1303, with three hundred eighty aboard, and that was the big job of the day. At 1406 the liner *Madagascar* blasted off for Ganymede, carrying two hundred and six.

Most of the two hundred and six had already arrived at the spaceport, and were nervously smiling at each other as they paced up and down the waiting room. There hadn't been a major spaceship disaster in the past decade, but people still regarded spaceflight as risky business.

There were a dozen private craft at the spaceport that morning, ranging in size from the heavy-duty freight boat owned and operated by Transspace Shipping to the slim, two-man pleasure vessel belonging to Nicholas Rocklin, the publishing tycoon. Rocklin's ship, *Cleopatra*, was in center position on the field, its slender needle-like hull glinting bright red in the morning sun.

Rocklin was planning to take a brief jaunt to Callisto later in the day. *Cleopatra* was fueled and ready, and Lee

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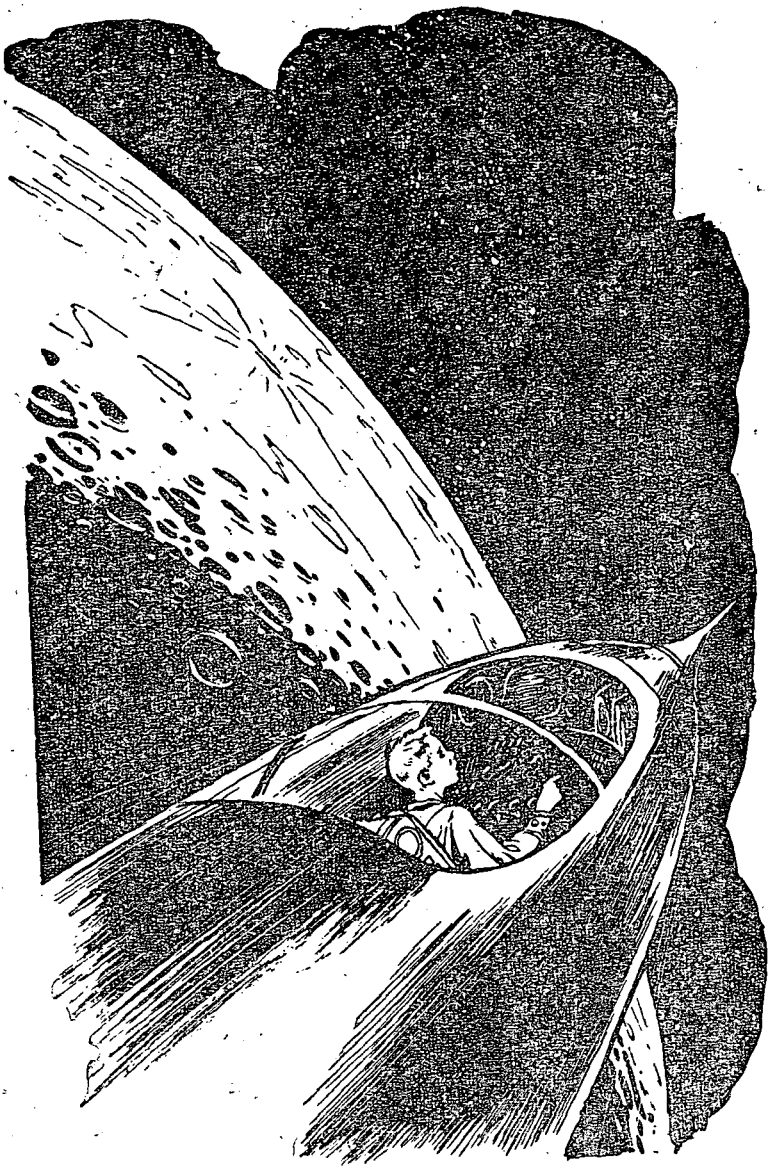

Pete Willer was near the moon now . . .

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Ohmer, Rocklin's private pilot, was at the spaceport, awaiting the arrival of his employer.

The ship would leave at 1352, or so said the Arrival & Departure blackboard. But *Cleopatra* was due for an unscheduled flight somewhat earlier than that.

THE OFFICE of the spaceport's chief medic, Dr. Claude Grosvenor, was quiet that morning, too.

There had been one case for him, a young fueler who had gashed his hand on the trunk of a feedline. Grosvenor had handled the job like the routine thing it was, cleaning the boy's hand with a vibrotool that cleared away the oil and grease, sterilizing the nasty wound, stitching it radionically.

"Keep that hand out of action for two days," Grosvenor said as he bound it. "Give it a chance to heal. And keep your wits about you the next time you're handling a feedline, youngster."

"Sure, Doc. Thanks a lot."

The fueler left. Methodically, mechanically, Dr. Grosvenor pulled his record-card from the cabinet and inked in a brief report of the accident.

Varangi, Simo F., age 20. Fueler, third class.

Grosvenor finished his account of the accident and refiled young Varangi's card. He sighed. There had been one notation at the bottom of the card that hit Grosvenor hard.

Matric. Federal Space Academy 12 Sep 2021. Discharged 14 Jan 2023, Unsatisfactory reflexes.

GROSVENOR knew the pattern. A boy dreams of space for years, finally wins the coveted berth at the Academy, goes through his first few months, or years—

And then the tests, the tests that tell him his peripheral vision's too narrow, his finger-reflexes a thousandth of a second too slow, his adrenalin-injection proclivity a point off balance. That was his end; a spaceship pilot has to be something of a superman, and unfortunately, not everyone fits the bill.

Oh, it's possible to blast a spaceship off. The mechanics of the job are not so difficult, and anyone who has studied the manuals diligently can manage to get a ship off the ground. But maneuvering—and especially, landing—are jobs for only a few. A spaceship out of control is the deadliest weapon known to man.

So Varangi flunked out of the Academy after the Soph Physical as had so many others. The Long Island Spaceport and every other spaceport in the world was staffed with the nine-out-of-ten who couldn't get past Academy requirements, but who had too much space in their veins to

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be able to drop back into mundane life.

THEY HUNG on, at the spaceports. They took jobs as fuelers, as hangarmen, as t i c k e t-sellers—anything to stay near the big ships and watch them streak upward. They took jobs as flight routers, switchboard operators, m e c h a n i c s, popcorn merchants.

Even—Grosvenor thought moodily—*even as spaceport medics.*

Grosvenor, Claude L. Matric. Federal Space Academy 14 Sep 1993. Discharged 11 Jan 1995. poor physical condition. They had found a heart murmur; a spacepilot has to be a perfect physical specimen.

Matric. Columbia College of Physicians and Surgeons, 22 Sep 1995. Granted degree Doctor of Medicine 2 June 1999. Assigned Long Island Spaceport 11 Feb 2002.

He had been here twenty-one years, watching the big ships take off. He had never left the surface of the Earth. He had never as much as set foot inside a spaceship in his life.

Some men find second-best o c c u p a t i o n s, Grosvenor thought. He stared out the broad window at the row of hulls gleaming in the noon sunlight, and sighed. He was a pretty good doctor, he knew, but despite the Hippocratic Oath he was a fraud. Unlike his fellow doctors, Grosvenor stood in no awe of his profession. He just did his job, and that was all it was.

Just a job; nothing more. There was only one profession that mattered, and Grosvenor had long since been cut off from that.

GROSVENOR glanced up as the door to his office opened. He grinned at the tanned spaceman who stood there.

"Hello, Lee. How goes it?"

"Can't complain. Blasting off for Callisto this afternoon," Ohmer said. "Old man Rocklin's taking a little vacation again."

"The pleasures of the idle rich," Grosvenor said. He leered. "I'll bet you're mentioned in his will, Lee; all private pilots are. Why don't you give him a few extra g's on blastoff today, and finish the old buzzard? We won't miss him—and if you'll slip me a cut, I'll fake the death certificate to put you in the clear."

Ohmer shook his head. "I much appreciate the offer, Doc, but it won't work. Rocklin's built out of beryllium steel and structural concrete. I'll bet he could take more grav than *I* could—and he's sixty-eight. Besides, I get good pay from him. Fifteen thousand's okay, considering that I spend three weeks out

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of every month doing nothing."

"Sure it's okay—but how long can it keep up? You're twenty-six now, Lee. You've only got four more years—that's sixty grand, isn't it? And old Rocklin probably will leave you about a hundred thousand in a lump, if you knock him off now."

"No, Doc," Ohmer said, his face suddenly dark. Grosvenor reddened; he realized he had carried the joke too far, to the point of hurting the pilot. When a spaceman reached thirty, he wrote a '30' to his career too. And any spaceman past the age of twenty-five was acutely conscious of the enforced retirement that was due to be thrust on him in the next few years.

Which was worse? Grosvenor wondered: to go to space and have it all taken away from you at the age of thirty, or never to have gone at all?

OUT LOUD, he said, "I'm sorry, Lee," in a contrite voice. "I guess I'm in a screwball mood today. I didn't mean to joke about—about *that*."

There was an awkward little silence; then Ohmer said, "Don't worry about it, Doc. I'm not offended. I know what's griping you—and believe me, I feel for you. Hell, I've *been* up there!"

Grosvenor had his answer. Just a taste of the sky's blackness, just a few moments above the clouds—that was worth a whole lifetime of grubby doctoring on the ground.

He turned away, and stared out the window—the big picture-window they had given him, so he could watch the graceful ships as they came and went.

"You've got to hand it to that Rocklin," Grosvenor said, his eyes on the supple lines of the *Cleopatra*. "He really travels in style. That ship of his must be the loveliest private job in the world."

"You're not kidding. He poured millions into it. And it's the smoothest, gentlest job to pilot you could imagine. Why—"

"Must be something wrong with my eyes," Grosvenor said irrelevantly.

"Huh?"

The doctor blinked them two or three times. "Guess I need new glasses; I'm seeing things."

He pointed to the tapering *Cleopatra*, alone in the center of the blastoff field. "Seems like your jets are firing. But that's impossible, isn't it?"

Ohmer chuckled. "Must be a mirage. The heat's getting you, Doc."

But Grosvenor shook his head. "No. Come here and see for yourself!"

STILL CHUCKLING, Ohmer moved to the win-

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dow. A quiet strangling sound rumbled up from his throat. "You see what I see?"

Grosvenor nodded.

The *Cleopatra* was twenty feet off the ground, standing on a tail of fire so bright it hurt the eyes. It wobbled there hesitantly for a second or two, then began to rise.

It climbed eccentrically, but within moments it had arched through the atmosphere and was out of sight.

It couldn't have happened. But it had.

A few seconds later, the keening wail of the emergency alarm siren began to shrill through the spaceport.

FOR PETER MICHAEL Willer, who was fourteen, the day began in an ordinary fashion. The alarm had been set for 7:45, but, as usual, Pete woke at 7, without mechanical aid. There were much more important things to do than sleeping.

He snapped off the alarm, reached under his pillow, and drew out the latest copy of *Fact Space Comics*. It showed a spaceship orbiting in on Saturn, bright ion-flares trailing from its jets, while a sister ship approached the ringed planet in a wider course.

He had read the issue twelve times—but there wouldn't be another for three weeks, and so he had no choice but to read it again.

When he was through, he glanced up at the books on his shelf—the brightly-colored volumes labelled *"How To Pilot Space Ships" and "Astrogation Made Easy."* He knew every word of them by heart. He took them down, fondled their tattered pages, put them back.

He dressed slowly, tiptoed through the silent house, opened the front door. It was a bright, clear morning; he squinted into the distance and saw the beacon tower of the Long Island Spaceport, and a little quiver of excitement ran through him.

The mail had arrived. Peter snatched it up anxiously and riffled through it.

Bills. Letters from his father, stationed in New Mexico working on a top-secret space project. A comic book that his silly kid sister subscribed to.

AH! HERE it is! He felt his heart start to pound as he came across the official-looking white envelope.

It was addressed in firm block letters to:

Mr. P. M. Willer, Jr.
43 Red Maple Drive North
Levittown, Long Island

The return address was even more exciting:

Federal Academy of Astrogation,
Admissions Office
Washington 6, D. C.

Letting the other letters

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drop unheeded to the ground, he ripped it open and read it:

13 May 2023

Mr. P. M. Willer, Jr.
43 Red Maple Dr. N.
Levittown, Long Island

My dear Mr. Willer:

Thank you for your letter of 6 May. We are in receipt of your application for admission to the Academy, and have considered it most carefully.

On the basis of the information you give, I can safely say that you have the necessary enthusiasm and willingness to learn that marks a successful Academy candidate. However, you fail to toe the mark in one respect. Minimum age for admission to Academy is 18, and this cannot be waived in any case whatsoever.

Therefore, may I suggest that you contact us again in four years, when you will be eligible for admission? I'm sure there'll be room for someone of your potentiality in the Class of 2031, and I'll be looking forward to hearing from you again when you've completed your high-school courses four years hence.

With all good wishes, Col. Walter D. Thompson, USSC
Director of Admissions

PETER STARED at the letter bitterly after he was finished reading it. Anger and frustration nearly brought tears to his eyes, but he choked them back. He looked at the letter again.

They turned me down. He had never expected that; he had been sure that the letter he had written would be certain to get him in. Hadn't he studied spaceflight for half his short life? Didn't he know the basic manuals backward and forward? They had no *right* to turn him down.

They had been very polite about it. Go away, little boy; come back in four years. *Four years!* He would be eighteen, then—practically an old man, as spaceflight went. There would be a mere twelve years of space for him after that—and then he'd be grounded, the way his father had been, and would spend his time looking up at the stars wistfully, remembering—

Four years was too long to make a guy wait. He was fourteen, now; that ought to be old enough. He knew what he was doing. He could handle a ship!

PETER CLENCHED and unclenched his fists. Ahead of him, the shining beacon of Long Island Spaceport seemed to beckon to him.

He turned to go back inside. It was breakfast-time, and his mother would get suspicious if he didn't show up.

He handed her the mail—all but *his* letter—and ate listlessly. You weren't supposed to eat for four hours before

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a spaceflight. Well, that was only until eleven or twelve o'clock.

"Have a good day at school today, Peter," his mother said as he left.

"What? Oh—yeah. Sure, Mom. See you at 3 o'Clock."

He picked up his briefcase, making sure it was closed. His mother might wonder why he was taking *"Astrogation Made Easy"* and *"How to Pilot Space Ships"* with him to school that morning.

I'll show them, he thought determinedly. *I'm not going to wait any four years.*

HE REACHED the corner, turned sharply, making sure he was out of his mother's line of sight, in case she was watching him from the porch, and doubled back down a side street. Minutes later, he was aboard the bus heading toward the Long Island Spaceport.

Tension began to gather around him. It seemed as if the bus driver were reading his mind as he slipped the token in the slot and passed through the photofield into the bus—as if the driver were about to say, "You ought to be in school now. But I know why you're going to the Spaceport; you're going to steal a ride in a spaceship!"

The others in the bus seemed to be hurling the same unspoken indictment at him as he took his seat. Peter managed to ignore them.

He heard them talking: "The *Madagascar* leaves at 1406, doesn't it?"

"That's right, honey."

"It won't be late, Joe? I'd hate to sit around there for hours."

"Don't worry. Spaceships are *never* late. Something about orbits and things; they gotta stay on schedule."

Peter grinned contemptuously. Of course a spaceship came and went on time; an orbit was a split-second affair. These people were probably leaving on the big liner, or going to see someone off.

THE TRIP from Levittown to the spaceport was longer than he remembered it; it was nearly 0900 when he arrived. The bus let him off at the big gate.

He went through. A gray-uniformed guard stood there. "Mind if I check your briefcase over, sonny? We don't want any bombs coming in here."

Peter handed the guard the briefcase. The guard unsnapped it, peered inside, handed it back smiling broadly. "I guess that stuff is harmless enough," he said. *"Astrogation Made Easy"*, huh? You got your eye on the Academy?"

Peter nodded. "I put my application in already. They said I was too young."

The guard laughed. "Just a leetle," he said. "But in a few years you'll have your chance.

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Good luck, too. I almost made it myself."

"You almost—" Peter stopped. "Oh. I see. Gosh, I'm sorry."

The guard's smile faded. "It doesn't bother me much. But you'd better get moving. I'm not supposed to be talking on duty."

Peter went on in. The spaceport loomed up all around him—administration buildings here and there, and the big beacon tower, and fuel hangars. And out there was the vast landing field.

He saw the towering bulk of the *Madagascar*, the giant liner due to depart this afternoon. He saw the other smaller ships.

And he saw the slender *Cleopatra*, standing alone in the center of the field. His pulse-rate jumped; that was the one for him!

IT TOOK nearly two hours for him to find out what he wanted to know. Finally, an obliging fueler gave him the information: "That's the *Cleopatra*, boy. Private ship, belongs to Mr. Nicholas Rocklin."

"And what time is it leaving here?"

"Oh, after lunch some time. 1352, I think. You playing hookey today?"

Peter grinned artfully. "I like to watch spaceships blast off," he said in explanation. "Who's piloting the *Cleopatra?*"

"Fellow named Lee Ohmer. Mr. Rocklin's personal pilot—sort of a chauffeur. He's around here someplace, if you want to meet him." Before Peter could say anything, the fueler turned and yelled, "Hey, Ohmer! You here?"

After a moment another fueler said, "He's up in Doc Grosvenor's office, Phil!"

"I didn't really want to meet him," Peter said. "I—just wanted to see the ship. It's a standard ion-drive ship, isn't it?"

"Huh—uh, yeah. Sure."

"With conventional reaction-mass? Water-fueled?"

"That's right. Say, you're really up on your spaceships, aren't you?"

"It's a hobby of mine," Peter admitted. "I guess I'm too late to watch the ship being fueled. It's all ready to go, isn't it?"

"Yeah. It's all fueled up. But they're still loading the *Madagascar*, over there. You can try to get a field pass and watch them doing it."

"THANKS, mister." Peter started to walk away. Suddenly he turned and said, "Thanks an awful lot."

"Don't mention it," the fueler said absently, and went back to his job. Clutching the handle of his briefcase tightly, Peter edged toward the railing that separated the observers from the landing-field itself.

The *Cleopatra* looked all

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alone, out there. It was fueled up and ready to go. Maybe they wouldn't notice one small boy sneaking around the back way...

They didn't. He arrived at the *Cleopatra* somewhat out of breath but totally unnoticed. The catwalk of the small vessel had been extruded, and the airlock was wide open.

Quickly Peter began to climb. He expected them to start yelling any minute, but so far he hadn't been noticed; people just didn't expect small boys to steal spaceships.

He reached the open airlock and clambered in. For a moment his mind went blank —then, he closed his eyes and let the words of the manuals come flooding into the front of his mind, washing away the fear.

He was inside a spaceship. He knew exactly what to do.

HE GRABBED the red lever inside the airlock and yanked down on it, hard. The outer door slid shut with a soft hissing noise, and sealed. Well, maybe they'd notice that from outside, but now it was too late; they wouldn't be able to get him out in time.

The inner lock opened; he stepped through hurriedly, and it clanged shut again. He was in the lounge of the small ship.

Gaily now he made his way to the fore control cabin now, edging up the narrow companionway. He entered it.

It was wonderful. There were the great plexiplast windows from which he would be able to see the sparkling brightness of the stars and the pockmarked face of the moon in a few minutes. Over the control panel was set the ship-to-Earth telescreen.

And the control panel! It was beautiful! All the complex array of dials and levers and switches, which looked so terrifying to a layman but which he knew as thoroughly as the dashboard of his father's turbojet or the knobs of the family tv. There was the pilot's seat, cushioned against the crushing impact of blastoff; there was the Radar guide, there the blasting key, there the jet console. It was all there.

He swung himself into the pilot's seat. He was big for his age, but there was still plenty of room. He drew his instruction manuals out of the briefcase and spread them out within reach in case he needed them.

Then he proceeded to set the *Cleopatra* up for blastoff. He planned to circle the moon and return; that ought to prove to the Academy that he belonged there!

HE ONLY needed to refer to the manuals once, on a minor matter of adjusting the cabin gimbals so he would have an unobstructed forward view no matter what

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angle the ship took. Then he was ready.

He glanced out the viewing windows to make sure none of the field workers were within range of the jets. He saw a few fuelers in the distance, pointing at the *Cleopatra*, but they were safely out of range.

Calmly, he radioed Central Control and said, "This is Lieutenant Peter Michael Willer, aboard the *Cleopatra*. I'm blasting off for Luna now. Time exactly 1122."

He heard astonished sputtering coming from the speaker. "Lieutenant *who?* Where's your clearance? What kind of joke is this?"

"Blasting off!" he cried jubilantly, and jammed his forefinger down on the blasting key. He felt the jets throb beneath him—and a moment later the *Cleopatra* sprang away from the Earth's surface.

FROM THE window of Claude Grosvenor's office, Lee Ohmer watched his ship taking off. His face was pale, incredulous. "What the hell —how—"

"Piracy," Grosvenor said. "They've hijacked your ship right out from under your nose."

"It's crazy; you can't just steal a ship. Rocklin will kill me!"

Over the siren's wail came the boom of the public address system: *"Lieutenant Lee Ohmer, please report to Central Control at once. Lieutenant Lee Ohmer, please report to Central Control at once."*

"You heard them," Grosvenor said. "You better go find out what happened to your ship. Come on; I'll go with you."

They arrived at Central Control on a dead run. Major General Mahoney, the Spaceport Commander, was pacing up and down the office, his pudgy face creased in a bewildered frown.

"Ohmer? What the devil is this? Your ship just made an unauthorized—"

"I know: I saw it take off. What kind of supervision does this place have, anyway? How'd it happen?"

Mahoney shrugged. "We got a message just before the *Cleopatra* left. A Lieutenant Peter Michael Willer said he was blasting off, and he did."

"Peter Michael *who?*"

"Here's the announcement, right off our tapes." Mahoney handed the slip to Ohmer, who read it through.

"Never heard of him. Blasting off for Luna? What did he sound like?"

"Like a teenage boy," Mahoney said "There's going to be hell to pay for this." He turned to an aide and said, "Have you contacted the *Cleopatra* yet?"

"Be coming in any minute, sir. It's on a Moon orbit all right, sir."

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"Hurry it up. I want to find out who's aboard."

IT WAS LIKE floating, Peter thought. Jets cut off, the *Cleopatra* sliced like a needle through the eternal blackness. There was no sense of motion; he seemed frozen in time and space.

But there was Earth, a dwindling green sphere, the Americas visible in the classic view. And over there—that pockmarked globe growing larger was the Moon! A sprinkling of stars lay between them.

He could make out the craters clearly, the ringwalls and the rays and the vast maria. The Moon was cold and white and dead, a fishbelly color against a black velvet backdrop.

Everything was going perfectly. *Who said I can't pilot a spaceship!* he thought vehemently. *Here I am—making the Luna run solo!*

SUDDENLY the telescreen before him brightened. The face of a burly man in Space Corps uniform appeared. He looked angry. Peter grinned at him.

"Are *you* Lieutenant Willer?" the officer thundered. "Why—you're just a boy."

"I'm Pete Willer. Who are you, Major-General?"

"Mahoney. Base Commander. How did you get up there?"

"In a spaceship, Major-General Mahoney. It was easy." Peter pointed to the copy of *Fact Space Comics* spread open on the control panel. "I've studied; I know how to run a spaceship. I'm good enough to get into the Academy!"

"Why, you little delinquent! How—" The Major-General sputtered awkwardly for a moment. "Bring that ship down instantly! That's an order!"

"Sorry, sir; I'm making a Luna run. I'll bring the ship down as soon as I've circled the Moon. It won't take long."

"You little madman! What happens if the ship gets out of control?"

"But I'm on orbit, sir! Nothing can happen. I know what I'm doing." Peter smiled cheerfully. "Be seeing you soon, sir."

IN CENTRAL CONTROL, Lee Ohmer couldn't resist chuckling as he heard the conversation. "You've got to hand it to the kid; he's got the stuff. He can't be more than fourteen or fifteen, and he got that ship up there like an expert."

Major-General Mahoney, who had broken contact with the Cleopatra, regarded Ohmer coldly. "This is a very serious matter, Lieutenant. We'll have to bring that boy down on automatic. We can't trust him to land a ship by himself."

"But he seems to know—"

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"*Seems* isn't good enough. A spaceship crashing into Earth at full velocity could destroy a city. There's no question but that we'll have to immobilize his controls by remote wave and bring the ship back ourselves."

Ohmer shrugged. "If you think, so, sir. But let him get around the Moon first. As long as he got as far as he did, he deserves to see the other side."

THE DANGER of an out-of-control spaceship was so great that ships were designed to be monitored from the ground—that is, an Earth post could take over guidance of any ship orbiting in.

This was done with the *Cleopatra*. Lee Ohmer manned the controls at Long Island Spaceport, after Peter had completed his round-the-Moon circuit and had started the return journey. Ohmer waited until *Cleopatra* was well on its way toward Earth, then threw the switch freezing the ship's controls and cut in himself.

There was an angry protest from Peter. Ohmer said, "It has to be this way, son. I'll bring the ship in for you. You did a grand job, but we can't trust you to land it by yourself."

"But I can handle it! I know how to handle a landing orbit! I can—"

"Sorry," Ohmer said. "Can't risk it."

He guided the ship into its asymptotic curves, shoe-horning it down toward Earth. As it swung into the final ellipse and appraoched landing, Ohmer said, "Better strap down hard, son. It's going to be a lousy landing."

Ohmer flicked sweat away and glanced over his shoulder at Grosvenor, who was tensely standing by. "Get the field cleared, Doc," he murmured. "And have an ambulance ready. I'm a microsecond off, and *Cleopara's* going to come down with a bump."

"Okay," Grosvenor said.

"Damn these remote-control landings anyway," said Ohmer. "The kid could have done this well by himself." He hunched over the control panel, face contorted as if he were up there in the ship fighting gravity himself.

Moments later the *Cleopatra* appeared. It hung over the field for an instant, then dropped. The tail assembly crumpled; Ohmer winced. It had been a lousy landing, all right.

HE ARRIVED at the scene a moment after Grosvenor. The doctor turned to the stretcher-bearers and said, "I'll yell if we need you." To Ohmer he said, "Come inside with me. I don't know my way around these damned ships."

Peter was still in the control cabin of the damaged

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ship, eyes closed, face very pale. A little trickle of blood dribbled down one cheek.

Grosvenor bent over him. After an anxious moment Ohmer said, "Doc, is he—"

"He's alive, if that's what you mean. Broken ribs, internal bleeding. He's in bad shape, but he ought to pull through."

"It was a lousy landing," Ohmer repeated. "A lousy landing. But the kid would have killed himself; no one can land a ship on the first try."

The boy stirred. From outside the angry voice of Major-General Mahoney bellowed, "Is that delinquent in there? I want to see him! We'll press charges! We'll—"

Ohmer walked to the lip of the ruptured ship. He looked out and said, "Shut up. The kid's hurt."

"He's waking up," Grosvenor said. The doctor shook his head sadly. "The poor kid. He'll never get into the Academy now—not the way he's banged up. He'll never pass the physical."

But he was thinking, *At least he got there once. He saw the backside of the Moon. I never even got there.*

The boy opened one eye, then another.

"Take it easy," Grosvenor said. "I'm the spaceport medic. You'll be all right. Just hold still."

The boy grinned weakly. "How'd I do, Doc? Did I do all right?"

Grosvenor nodded. "You did just fine, son. Just fine."

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COMPULSIONS

by Peter Stom

illustrated by EMSH

The computer showed that it was impossible for this mental patient to escape from the sanitarium. Fine—only the patient had already escaped!

ESCAPE impossible!

Psycho - Inspector Bruce Gorgas sighed and switched off the machine, resisting the impulse to force the issue further. It was compulsory to follow the recommended procedure to the letter, and the question had been very carefully prepared—by experts—to prevent any fouled circuitry in SSA's main computer. Given such and such a set of conditions, would it be possible or impossible for the patient to escape? The tape had given the only logical answer.

Unfortunately the patient was gone!

Somehow the data was either wrong or incomplete, and called for the personal attention—almost unheard-of these days—of an human investigator from the Social Stabilization Agency. It had been inevitable that Gorgas would get the job. He was the only man left in the organization whose experience stretched back to the time when it had been known as the Police Department.

He looked wistfully at the memory banks of the computer and sighed again. In cases such as these, it was mandatory to make a completely independent investigation, thus avoiding the false data that had misled the machines.

Leaning back in the control chair, he prodded his memory for some of the old-time techniques. Proper handling of the problem could result in one more promotion before his retirement in the coming month. Outwardly, he must present a

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"He came right through the wall of Mrs. Kroll's apartment."

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picture of perfect bureaucratic efficiency; but first, he needed a check valve against the inadequacies the system might show in an emergency like this. A few moments later, a broad smile spread over his face; he got to his feet and walked jauntily out of the computer room.

WHEN HE arrived back in his office, Gorgas rang for his assistant, Psycho-Sergeant Mead. His smile faded a bit around the edges at the sight of his seedy-looking underling. He make a mental note to check a few of the books he had collected fo[illegible]y some years ago at the st[illegible]t of his public service car[illegible]er. It might be necessary to have several of the ancient techniques at his disposal.

"We're going to make a personal investigation," he said abruptly.

"No!" Mead's eyebrows danced. "What's the matter with the machines?"

"They give the wrong answer about Alexander Kroll's disappearance from the Euthanasium last night."

"Impossible!" The eyebrows convulsed spasmodically this time.

"You're quoting the main computer," Gorgas replied evenly. "Nevertheless the man is gone; and our main problem is to find out exactly how he did it. Kroll himself is no longer dangerous."

"Why not?"

"Because he's a very sick man. Like all the rest of those who have been assigned to euthanasia in the past twenty years, he volunteered as an experimental subject for our esteemed colleagues from the Abnormal Psychology Division. They didn't quite kill him, but they sure tried hard."

"Well!" Mead gasped, obviously relieved. "What do we do now?"

"We copy an antique art of our ancestors called 'Cherchez la femme.' In other words we visit his wife. Get out your recorder and make a note of the equipment we'll need."

"WHO IS IT?" The voice was low and tremulous.

"Inspector Gorgas of the SSA." He got a definite pleasure out of omitting the customary medical preface to his rank. After all, this was a special investigation where personal authority must be exercised.

"Oh! Just a moment, please!"

There was a click as the maximum security lock responded to whatever intimate characteristic the apartment's occupant had—after proper approval, of course—chosen as an "open sesame," and the door swung back. He blinked involuntarily, trying to reconcile the disheveled figure

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with the usual cosmeticized appearance of modern women.

"Mrs. Kroll?"

"Yes."

"I'm here in regard to your husband's disappearance from the Euthanasium. I suppose you've heard about it?"

"It's been on Tri-D all day," she whimpered; "I'm scared to death."

"Why?" The Inspector's voice vibrated with surprise.

"I'm the one who turned him in. Not that I'm sorry! My social conscience just couldn't stand his unconventional attitudes. But he promised to come back if he were ever released. He might even strike me!"

"Oh," Gorgas said with satisfaction, "then you won't mind hypno-analaysis on the situation?"

"I guess not," she whispered. Somehow her face went a shade whiter.

"Fine!" Gorgas smiled, whipping out a routine permission form. "I always hate to use compulsion. Just sign here; it stipulates that we confine the analysis to the subject at hand." He pushed his way into the apartment followed closely by Sergeant Mead.

AFTER SHE had affixed a somewhat shaky signature to the form, he nodded to his assistant. Mead ducked into the hall and reappeared almost immediately with a Junior Psychologist, trailed by two technicians bearing the shining complexity of a narco-hypnosis machine.

"How about in your own bedroom, Mrs. Kroll?" Gorgas asked with a considerable show of sympathy.

The dazed woman started to nod her head, but was led away by the psychologist before she could complete the formality. Gorgas cut off Mead's questions with a firm clasp on the younger man's elbow and a forbidding frown. A stiff silence followed until, after four or five minutes, the psychologist came back to the bedroom door.

"She's completely under now, sir."

"Fine! Get started, Sergeant! And don't forget to make out the retroactive compulsion forms when you get back to the office."

Once again Mead disappeared into the hall. This time, a veritable horde of technicians followed him into the apartment. They all paused for a moment, looking the place over.

"Bug this place thoroughly!" Gorgas ordered firmly. "The usual olfacto, visio and audio, plus the new experimental emoto. Do this job right and it will solve the case for us."

He and Mead wandered aimlessly around the apartment until the technicians had finished and cleaned up, restoring the place exactly to its former appearance.

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After a final check of all the installations, Gorgas stuck his head through the bedroom door.

"She knows nothing about her husband's disappearance," the psychologist said; "she'll be out of narcosis in about ten minutes."

"Take care of her," Gorgas instructed. "We're leaving now."

Outside in the hall, Mead once again opened his mouth for a few thousand well-chosen questions, but Gorgas silenced him with a gesture. Not until they were settled did he turn to explain, showing a minimum of condescension.

"This bug job should really do the trick. Kroll has no credits, no credentials—nothing. His only chance is that his wife will help him, even though she did turn him in.

"Meanwhile, we'll go through the formalities according to the book. Meet me in front of the Euthanasium at 9:00 tomorrow morning. We'll make that director sorry he was so inefficient; he may deserve a compulsory demotion."

"LET'S GET down to business!" Gorgas exclaimed, waving away the Director's offer of a Venusian cigarillo. "Are you recording, Mead"

"There isn't much to tell," the Director replied with a faint shrug. The patient was confined in the extreme west end of the infirmary, separated from the other physically ailing patients by a transparent safety screen. It's the usual practice in isolating a man physically without cutting him off from the outside world completely. He was just—"

"Hold it!" the Inspector interrupted, his voice flat and hard. "Let's start from the beginning—from your very first memories of Alexander Kroll."

"Hummm!" The Director rubbed his chin reflectively and seemed on the verge of objecting; then he shrugged his shoulders again. "Naturally they start with his folder. He was first committed to the Violent Ward of City Rehabilitation, where he showed negative progress to even the most drastic treatments available. He had been reported as 'antisocial' by both his wife and his fellow workers. More important, he had openly criticized the omniscience of the computers. In time, of course, he was remanded here as 'probably hopeless'.

"After the usual plasticization by two months of doubt as to his status, he was offered the opportunity of volunteering for service to the Abnormal Psychology Division. I'll have to refer you to Dr. Hanford of that department for the objectives and details of the experimental study." The Director paused

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delicately and helped himself to a drink of water from the automatic dispenser on his desk.

"IN ANY CASE," he continued, "Kroll became spastic after ten days of experimental feeding, and soon after fell into a complete coma. Since his laboratory-controlled diet contained radioactives of some sort, I had been half expecting such a reaction. I ordered him into immediate isolation. He remained in the coma for fifteen days, after which he began to regain his physical mobility; but he showed no signs of mental recovery.

"He was then moved to the infirmary—behind the transparent safety screen, of course—and given the usual physiotherapy. He showed no apparent mental progress over a period of a month, but kept exhibiting unusual physical symptoms. Then on the night of April 25th, sometime between the check hours of two and three-thirty in the morning, he disappeared." The Director held out the palms of his hands.

"And that's it!"

Gorgas pulled at his lower lip and studiously wrinkled his brow. "What were these unusual physical symptoms you mentioned?"

"Well, let's see." The Director rolled his eyes toward the ceiling. "There were numerous skin lesions—not so remarkable for their appearance, as for the rapidity with which they came and went. Then on one occasion there was a curious loss of all body hair, fingernails and toenails. They were found in a neat pile beside his cot one morning."

"Any medical explanation for these symptoms?"

"Not particularly, except that radioactive exposure is liable to do anything."

GORGAS pushed out of his chair and took a turn around the office. He turned on the Director suddenly. "Is there any connection between the illness and the disappearance?"

"I wondered about that myself," the other shot back. "But Dr. Hanford said no, and I couldn't think of any logical connection. Can you?"

Gorgas snorted. "That's not what I mean. Obviously this was an inside job; which of your doctors or attendants might have had misguided feelings of sympathy for him?"

"I suggest, the Director said softly, exhibiting his first smile of the morning, "that you consult the hypno-analyses already made concerning that subject. They cover everyone from myself down to the lowest apprentice attendant."

"Oh!" The Inspector was momentarily confused. "Were they reliably done?"

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"I believe our Dr. Brecht is considered the originator of the most recent improvements in the technique, and I handled his own analysis personally."

"I see," Gorgas floundered.

"In addition," the Director continued gleefully, "all of the patients in the infirmary on that particular night were also examined, with negative results—all except one, that is."

"Ah! Gorgas exclaimed, "and why not that one?"

THE DIRECTOR'S palms flew out. "He's an old man and has been here a long time since his volunteer work with the Abnormal Psychology Division. There were no living relatives to sign the permission papers, and he refused to do it himself. The question of compulsory analysis has been passed on to higher authority for resolution. There hasn't been time for a reply yet although, in view of all the other evidence, I can't imagine what the old man could add."

"I see." The Psycho-Inspector had regained his composure now. "May I see him personally? I can authorize compulsion if necessary."

"Of course." The Director gave some instructions over his private visi-com and turned back to his visitors. "Let me warn you that Old Fuzzy—Mr. Coleman, that is—plasticizes with difficulty."

An embarrassed silence settled down in the office until the door finally opened to admit an attendant guiding an electric wheel chair. The figure in the chair, dressed in chrome yellow of the chronic patient, was thin and frail. It was topped by an extremely wrinkled face that somehow escaped the usual ugliness associated with old age. In general the wrinkles all curved upward, complimenting a set of twinkling blue eyes.

"I'm from the SSA," Gorgas said severely.

"Delighted to meet you," a reedy voice replied.

"I understand you refused to sign a permission slip for hypno-analysis on the disappearance of Alexander Kroll. Why?"

"What good would my signature be? I'm supposed to be crazy!"

"You're a patient!" Gorgas barked in sudden exasperation. "You came under the same rules and regulations as any other patient. Don't you know we can compel you?"

"I suppose so!" The old man shrugged his shoulders. "But if you were me, you would probably try to refuse, too. Don't you know why I'm here?"

"No! Why?"

"I HAVE THE...er... gift of visual imagery. Years ago when I used to describe what I see in verse, I

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was known as a poet. I hate to think of what I'd see or say under the influence of those damned drugs of yours."

"Bah!" the Inspector growled. He knew there was nothing to be gained from an ancient patient with hallucinations, but he forced himself to continue along formal lines. He wanted an impressive report about his thoroughness to go in from the Director's office.

"You are in no position to diagnose your own ailments. The State has tried to help you out of your difficulties, and now it demands help from you in return."

The old man pondered for a moment. "If I tell you what I know," he asked suddenly, "will you promise to spare me the needle?"

"You know something?" It was the Director's turn to show temper.

"I think I saw something." The upturned wrinkles curved a little more.

"We can promise nothing definite," Gorgas said imperiously. "Tell us what you saw!"

The old man chuckled to himself. "I couldn't sleep the night Kroll left and I was watching him through the transparent safety wall. It was about three o'clock in the morning when he took his nightgown off."

Gorgas grimaced in disgust and motioned the attendant to take the patient away.

"Wait a moment, Inspector!" the Director interrupted. "Kroll's nightclothes were found beside the cot. Go ahead Coleman; what happened next?"

"He just stood there breathing real deep for a while. Then he walked through the outside wall."

"What?"

The old man looked at each of the other four faces in turn and tittered softly. "That's right! He took off his nightgown, took a few deep breaths and walked through the wall. Incredible, isn't it?"

"Garbage! Gorgas threw his hands in the air and stalked out of the office, followed by his assistant. In the corridor, Mead kept tapping his shoulder until he nodded shortly.

"Should I turn the recorder off, Inspector?"

"YES, I REMEMBER the case," Dr. Hanford said in a deep but softly modulated voice. He was short and fairly stout, with a moon face and lank dark hair. Only his snapping black eyes made an impression of active intelligence. "Too bad it turned out the way it did," he continued. "We had such hopes for propitious results."

"Is that so?" Gorgas growled, turning to make sure Mead was recording the interview. The whole affair was beginning to get under his skin.

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"Did you know Kroll had disappeared from the Euthanasium?"

"No!" The doctor allowed expression to touch his features momentarily and then shrugged. "Not that it makes any difference! He was in very bad shape the last time we examined him.

"I'm afraid it makes a lot of difference to us at SSA."

"Well," Hanford smiled, "you people are prone to take the wrong things seriously. It's obviously a case of inefficiency at the Euthanasium. The man was completely incapacitated mentally—and almost as bad physically."

"The investigation has been very thorough, Dr. Hanford; there is evidence that he was not incapacitated."

"NONSENSE!" The doctor's face was suddenly very red. "Are you suggesting he actually made a premeditated escape?"

"Perhaps."

"Good Lord, man, what kind of evidence are you talking about?"

"His body had not been found," Gorgas replied uncomfortably. He could visualize Hanford's reaction to the fantastic tale from Coleman; he didn't believe it, himself, yet analysis had confirmed the old man's story. Unfortunately the technique could not distinguish between experience and a strongly-embedded hallucination—not without weeks of further work on the ancient patient.

"Admittedly the evidence is not very strong but, on the other hand, our routine tracing procedures are usually one hundred percent effective. It makes it necessary for us to check every detail of what happened."

"Very well," Hanford glared, his face still red, "but you can be sure your office will hear about this." He turned his attention to his auto-file and dialed a series of numbers. The mechanism clicked a few times and a fat folder popped out of a slot near his left hand. He lifted it out carefully and the feel of it seemed to soothe his temper magically. He leaned back in his chair as calm and imperturbable as when the interview had begun.

"When Kroll was diagnosed as socially hopeless," he said smoothly, "we were automatically notified. As you must know—the doctor let a faint sneer show through his serenity—"We use such cases for our advanced experimental work, not because their voluntary cooperation is easy to get, but because positive results on extreme deviates are much more convincing to the ultimate authorities.

THE DOCTOR glanced at his two visitors as he warmed to the subject at

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hand. "Since the '50s," he continued, "all our major strides in corrective psychology have been achieved through the use of biologically active chemicals. I believe one of the first was glutamic acid, which seemed to have beneficial results on the intelligence of certain classes of retarded children. Then there was adrenolutin which helped in the study of schizophrenia by inducing its symptons artificially and, discovered in the same general period, reserpine which had remarkable curative effects on depressive disorders."

Hanford paused a moment and checked the attentiveness of his audience. "In order to study the action of these effective chemicals in the body, we soon resorted to the radioactive tagging technique, usually incorporating Carbon -14 into the molecule we were studying. Gradually it became apparent that the radioactive form of some of these substances—particularly those that distrubuted themselves widely throughout the nervous system, rather than concentrating in a particular type of ganglia—had peculiar side effects."

"Please go on," Gorgas encouraged as the physician's attention seemed to wander.

"Ah, yes," the little man continued blandly. "In the small concentrations used at first, they seemed to equalize synaptic resistances throughout both the brain and the general nervous system. Thus they had the effect of weakening old habit patterns, making the patient more amenable to change—a result very much desired by the higher authorities.

"We wanted to experiment with similiar treatments at a higher concentrations of radioactive drugs—not only to prove the point, but to possibly cure a case as stubborn as Kroll's. Naturally we were aware of the element of risk involved."

"What kind of risk, Dr. Hanford?" Gorgas was suddenly alert.

"PERMANENT damage to the patient, of course!" Hanford smiled with obvious pleasure at the attending dampening effect on the Psycho-Inspector's enthusiasm. "The effect of radioactives on the human organism is still not entirely predictable and, even though Kroll was carefully treated both by injection and a special feeding diet, obviously the basic theory governing the experiment was—at least partially—in error."

"Well, what happened?"

"Three weeks after the treatments began, Kroll suddenly collapsed into a spastic state. He progressively lost control of his functions, until only his involuntary responses were operative. He remained in a deep coma for

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about thirteen days as I remember."

"What was your diagnosis?"

"Overdose!" the little doctor tittered. "That's invariably the cause of discouraging results with radioactives. Our concensus was that an unintended high degree of radioactivity completely equalized most synaptic resistances in his body, thus wiping out all habit patterns and learned responses. From a neurological point of view his nervous system reverted to that of a newborn baby—perhaps even further. By use of proper chelating agents, we were able to scavenger most of the activity out of him before it destroyed the more deeply i[illegible]ed involuntary reflexes; but not before major harm was done.

"We had lost interest in the case by then, but I understand he responded sufficiently to physiotherapy, as any baby would, to feed himself again and not be too much of a nuisance to his caretakers."

"Then you can think of nothing connecting his experimental treatment with his disappearance?" Gorgas asked, rising to his feet.

"Nothing!"

"Well, you'll be hearing from us." The two SSA men turned to leave.

"You'll be hearing from me, too," the little physician remarked as he shut the door gently behind them.

ABOUT MID-MORNING, three weeks later, Psycho-Inspector Gorgas returned to his desk from a meeting with the Commissioner. He was unhappy, embarrassed and scared. The Commissioner was also unhappy. Complaints had poured in from both the Euthanasium and the Abnormal Psychology Division. High officials were displeased and something had to be accomplished quickly. In fact the Commissioner was on his way to a special conference called by the Governor.

Insidiously the case had changed from an opportunity to become a hero into a mess that threatened to end Gorgas' career in failure. Somehow, in the very short time left to him, he must find a key fact that would relieve him of responsibility for the situation and relegate it back to the domain of the computers where—as usual—its resolution would be automatic.

Most disconcerting of all was a grim figure that kept stalking through the innermost corridors of his mind, walking through solid walls in defiance of all rules and regulations. How could the principles of compulsion be applied to such an individual? What other powers might he have?

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GORGAS JERKED his thoughts up short, reminding himself that the only evidence was from an insane witness. Chances against such a thing were fantastic. Wearily he reached for a switch on his desk. "Anything from those bugs at Mrs. Kroll's?"

"I'm not sure, sir." The technician's voice was uncertain.

"What's that mean?"

"We've got a three-hour record of Kroll and his wife together, but—"

"What! Why wasn't I notified immediately?"

"We just finished the first run through the main computer, and the data was rejected as invalid."

"Set it up again!" Gorgas yelled. "I'll be right down!"

Five minutes later he was sitting tensely over the pickup of the senso-player, absorbing the first part of the previous day's record tapes. Gradually his mouth fell open and his eyes glazed with astonishment. It took hours to finish the job, particularly since he had to back track and check some of the more incredible parts. Finally he turned the pickup off and leaned back in acute distress.

"That old man, Coleman, was right!" he muttered to himself. Suddenly he shook off the intense befuddlement and headed for the nearest visiphone. It took almost fifteen minutes to get through to the Commissioner at the Governor's mansion.

"I've got all the answers on the Kroll case," he said grimly. "The bugs in Mrs. Kroll's apartment finally did the job I expected." He listened for a while before continuing.

"I'd rather tell you personally, sir. It's a little—ah—startling." He listened again before signing off. Then he returned to his desk and rang for Mead.

"Pack up the Kroll recordings from yesterday and a sensoprojector. We've got to present the results at the Governor's mansion this very night." He grimaced at his slouching assistant. "It sounds like they have an inkling of what has happened."

Mead shrugged his shoulders and left to attend to his duties.

GORGAS slouched silently in his reclining seat all during the helio-jet trip to the executive house. He did some independent thinking for the first time in years. It was like waking up from a nightmare only to find oneself in a concentration camp. What on earth happened to the wonderful world of his boyhood?

For a moment, as the memories flooded back, he blamed the computers; but his conscience finally got the better

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of him. As usual, mankind itself was really to blame. It had made logic its new god, with computers merely as mechanical high priests.

"Too often," he thought to himself, "logic is the inflexible bond connecting the mist of a bad assumption with the stink of a bad conclusion. When 'Man is an animal' was fed to the computers, the result was social husbandry.

"Kroll, himself a product of compulsion, may destroy that pattern; by God, I'm beginning to hope that he does!"

The slight bump of the landing refocused his attention. He hopped out of the helio-jet and helped Mead carry some of the equipment into the Governor's study—a remarkable gesture on the part of a Psycho-Inspector toward a Psycho-Sergeant.

"BOIL IT down!" the Commissioner growled as the two SSA men started setting up the projector. "We'll check the records only if necessary." Gorgas grinned inwardly, he expected to be quite blunt.

"As a direct result of the experiments of the Abnormal Psychology Division," he stated gently, "Kroll now possesses supernatural—or at least superhuman—physical powers. He has complete conscious control over every characteristic of his body, including such basic physical properties as density and refractive index. He is limited only in that the control does not extend to a single atom outside those of his own living tissues.

"Consequently, he can become invisible, ooze though keyholes as a liquid—or a gas—and interpenetrate other matter such as the wall of the Euthanasium. Naturally it is impossible to follow him, impossible to restrain him—impossible to kill him."

"So that's how he did it!" the Governor exclaimed hoarsely.

"Nonsense" the Commissioner shouted. "No one could acquire such powers, regardless of what was done to him!"

"The radioactive drug destroyed all but the involuntary synapses in his nervous system," Gorgas continued. "I'd prefer you to hear what happened afterwards in his own voice. Would you dim the lights please?" He turned and busied himself with the projector.

AS THE lights faded, a three-dimensional view of an apartment bedroom appeared at the far side of the study. Gorgas struck a tab and the scene blurred with insanely rapid motion until it settled on a still-life of a woman in a nightgown, and a naked man, sitting on the edge of the sleeper. The man, whose long angular face

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glowed with inner serenity, had a restraining hand on the woman's shoulder to quiet her obvious fear. Gorgas struck another tab and the man began to live and speak.

"—and gradually my sensory perception faded completely and I entered a black, silent oblivion. I spent an infinite time nowhere, doing nothing, feeling nothing...

"I had no way of knowing how long the blackness—a sort of consciousness of unconsciousness—lasted. I simply became aware of the passage of time again. Later I sensed more specific signs of a world outside myself, but there was little correlation with what I had once known as reality. As I began to remember things more clearly, I came to realize that the last words I had heard Hanford say to the other physicians were true. I was inhabiting the unformed body of a newborn infant—but, unexpectedly, with a full-grown adult mind.

"Suddenly the uniqueness of my condition, and the tremendous opportunity it offered, became apparent. If I were to recover at all, I would have to learn over again every voluntary physical motion of an human being; but this time I could learn better than any person had ever done before.

"Once the idea occurred to me, it became an obsession. I practiced diligently, focusing my attention on each individual bone, muscle and nerve until, one by one, I gained perfect conscious control over it. I practised in secret, in the dead of the night, when the other infirmary patients were asleep, and there was only an occasional check by the attendants.

"Soon I could perform physical manipulations of my body that no other human would have imagined possible—but still I was not satisfied. I threw the full force of my hate against the social system I lived under into the effort. I tried and tried and—finally the dam broke.

"I gained control of the individual cells of my right hand. I spent hours one night amusing myself by reshaping that hand into a fantastic succession of hooves, claws and talons. I kept extending that conscious control until it included each molecule and, finally, each individual atom of my living body. It meant—"

GORGAS touched a button and the incredible scene

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died. The study lights automatically brightened, revealing the pale, rigid faces of the two high officials. The Commissioner breathed deeply for a few moments and then turned stiffly to face Gorgas.

"You are to be congratulated, Inspector," he said in a trembling voice. "This is a remarkable piece of work; it explains how this man has been able to invade the strictest privacy of the Governor and actually threaten him if certain changes weren't initiated in the rules for our daily existence. If this monster continues his activities he may ... ah ... cause considerable trouble."

The Commissioner paused and, with a great deal of effort, summoned a weak smile. Gorgas, suddenly knowing what was coming, smiled back with more inner contentment than he had felt in thirty years. Of all the problems he had ever faced in life, this was the one he was happiest to solve.

"The State will never forget the great service you have rendered, but"—the Commissioner's voice acquired substantial heartiness— "the problem isn't completely solved yet." He paused again, wiped his brow and continued. "Go out and bring Kroll into custody!"

"I'm sorry, sir, but I won't have time."

"What!" The Commissioner's heartiness was buried in a sudden avalanche of indignation.

"My retirement starts at midnight tonight," Gorgas interrupted. "It is now 11:48 PM." He smiled and started for the door of the study. "It's compulsory, you know."

Why should a stool-pigeon be willing to sing to a private eye, for cash, before he was paid? Was it because

DEATH IS SO SORDID

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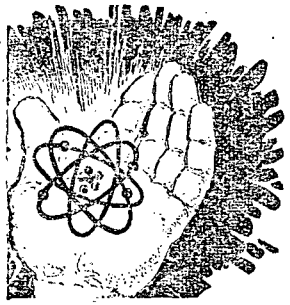
Editorial



JOB FOR A SUPERMAN

FOR A LITTLE over 32 years now, lovers of science fiction have been finding their reading matter largely in magazines devoted to the medium—magazines nearly all of which have sported fantastic and often gaudy cover art. Ever since 1926, readers have had to suffer the jibes of non science-fictionists, who wanted to know why they wasted their time with that "crazy stuff". And the most difficult times, throughout the entire period, no doubt, have been endured by under-age readers who had to appease or evade parental disapproval—judgements often made solely upon the basis of lurid covers.

At first, the defense gambit was that these were *scientific* stories, valuable for teaching science or at any rate, making science more interesting, helping to orient one into the subject. That defense collapsed and breathed its last in 1936 when Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories* metamorphosized into an action-adventure pulp entitled *Thrilling Wonder Stories*—a magazine which, for all its foibles, often presented the Gernsback type of material without the pretensiousness of its predecessor. (An attempt to unlock the past, and call up the spirit of the original *Amazing Stories* and *Science Wonder Stories*, in 1953, only proved that the essential salts had lost their savor.)

THE GENERATION which tried to justify science fiction reading on its educational value, (and its "Board of Well-Known Edu-

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cators") has seen a tremendous spread of the medium, and a wider toleration for it than we really expected; but toleration is no longer enough. Now many of the oldtime fans, as well as succeeding classes of science fictionists, want to see science fiction accepted as Literature worthy of respect. The radical element maintains that it *is* Literature; the conservative allows that it can *be* literature, if the standards both of writing and of criticizing science fiction are raised.

As I noted in last issue's editorial (and have stated more or less continuously for some years) all this is very fine; I'm in favor of it—but it means the imposition and acceptance of more discipline than many of the enthusiasts may be willing to take. One cannot rationally proclaim science fiction as true English Literature (in the British and American tradition), then simultaneously call "Slan" or "Grey Lensman" great novels—to name just a pair of examples—and expected to be taken seriously. By the standards that candidature to literature accepts *ipso facto*, both are pretentiously bad novels however enjoyable they may be for light reading.

I think it is time to ask a very important question. Not *"Is it possible for science fiction to be Literature?"* because that question answered itself—theoretically, at least. Theoretically, it is possible for any form of fiction to be the vehicle for Literature. The question, rather, is, ***"Is it likely that we will see great works of literature in the form of science fiction?"***

A recent letter goes into this question rather well, I think.

Dear RAWL:

You've talked about the proportion of worthwhile material to junk—all kinds of junk from glittering tinsel to garbage—in all ages, so it shouldn't be surprising to anyone if most of the science fiction published most certainly is not worthwhile material from any criterion of lasting merit. But aren't the odds against worthwhile science fiction much higher than they are against (to use some of your own examples) the sea story or the murder mystery?

Consider: what do the enduring classics have in common? They all have insight into human nature and behavior, whatever the setting, whether it be the *Pequod*, the environs of Mancha, the high sky of Austerlitz, or Scrooge's bedchamber. In each case, the author has chosen the background most suited for his investigations into the aspects of human behavior he wants to illuminate. Sometimes he was just writing about something he knew intimately; sometimes he had to investigate a background that wasn't entirely second nature to him

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from experience. Whichever the case, the characters were his own contemporaries, even if he reproduced the speech and gestures, and some of the recorded thoughts, of other times or places; the accent was still contemporary with the author.

That is art.

But science fiction is essentially out of this world, and the more "wonderful" it is, the more "otherworldly" it's going to be. Yet, to gain respect as science fiction—rather than allegory, or fantasy, or fable, or whatever—there must be close attention to the scientific background. It has to be comprehensible to us, yet "different", and still plausible—at the least, it mustn't exclude known science (as many stories do, because the author's lack of information, understanding, or concern, etc.) and generally having some element of prophecy" (which may mean that the story is ridiculously outdated within a decade).

THE AUTHOR, then, must be an artist who is capable of thinking like a scientist, or a scientist who is capable of feeling and expressing artistic "truth" like an artist.

You yourself have said that, for all your dislike of his medium, you considered Ray Bradbury an artist—and that you had no animus against his work so long as it wasn't labelled science fiction. And I think that Sturgeon's artistry has been hampered for some time by the necessity to make it sound something like science fiction. He's written enjoyable science fiction, but his best work not only isn't science fiction, in my opinion, but is lame from his attempting to make it seem like science fiction. It's fantasy—in that he uses fantasy as means to say what he's trying to say, a manner of focusing and distorting to arrive at what for him is a true picture; it is *not* fantasy in the sense that "The Moon Pool" is fantasy. "The Moon Pool" is an adventure story laid in a fantastic background, full of the author's private dream-works. But to write a new fantasy in that category, you just pick a different background, give the plot different twists, and pick a cast that doesn't sound too much like the last one if you can help it. (Usually an author can't, and Merritt never could.) The difference between "Moon Pool" and "Lest Darkness Fall" isn't much greater than the difference between an over-ripe melon and a sound, tangy apple. Some prefer less mature melons, some don't like apples—but both can be legitimately served as desserts.

Fantasy used in the Sturgeon manner, when he isn't try-

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ing to sell it as science fiction—as a device to say what he wants to say, rather than as a background for an adventure story—has long been accepted as a "reputable" form of fiction. Science fiction hasn't been accepted as "reputable", with a few exceptions which the better science-fiction critics have exposed as not being sound scientifically.

PERHAPS Dr. T. O'Connor Sloane was wiser than you credit him in maintaining that you had to allow a certain amount of poetic license—meaning that you had to license the author to ignore scientific limitations completely, at times. You mention Keller's "Human Termites" as a horrid example, but what about A. Hyatt Verrill's "World of Giant Ants"? There was no nonsense in that story *except* the fundamental waiver of the square-cube law, mass-weight ratio, etc. In other words, although I'm sure that Mr. Verrill knew better, he said: "Let's assume just one thing—that giant insects are possible; they exist in this place I'm going to tell you about; but except for their size, they behave exactly like ordinary insects." (I think Verrill knew better because he didn't start piling other fantastic assumptions upon his initial one, such as the insects trying to hybridize with human beings, as in Keller's "The Human Termites", or discovering that the human races (sic) were each controlled by a "great termite" type of Thing somewhere.) If the oldtime Gernsback authors got away with too many fantastic assumptions added to the necessary one, that was editorial error; they should have been kept in line. When they were so kept, we got real good stories, a lot of the time, even if no Literature. (Although I think that some of Wells' stories are close.)

I seem to have rambled a bit, but what I wanted to say was that I think the odds are much higher against any enduring work of Literature being written in the science fiction category than in any other category. The odds are against any particular writer, however great, being that much of a scientist; or any particular scientist being that much of a writer. In fact, if anyone wants to make a small wager, I'm willing to offer ten-to-one odds, on any January 1st, that no truly great science fiction novel will be published that year. (One which the best science fiction and the leading literary critics agree to be a first-rate work of fiction, one which they predict will endure.)

Please don't use my name. Any takers can address their

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letters to me c/o *Science Fiction Stories*, can't they? Oh yes—in my pen-name below, I'm using the term "cynical" in its original meaning, "a questioning attitude toward things in general", rather than its current use, "a disparaging attitude towards things in general".

Cynical Reader

While I don't endorse every one of your views, Cynical Reader, I'm in enough general agreement to forgo comment at the moment. But one thing should be borne in mind—writing a "great and enduring" novel isn't easy no matter what the medium. I won't say it's never been done to meet a deadline, or that it couldn't be done to meet a deadline—but the odds are very high against that, too.

RAWL.

★ Next Time Around ★

There are some authors whose names are brand-marks of quality, and one of these is Eric Frank Russell, author of "Three To Conquer", "Dreadful Sanctuary" and the still-remembered "Sinister Barrier". He'll be with us in a novelet entitled "Early Bird". At this writing, it's a little too early to be sure about other features, but we can tell you that Emsh has done another of his well-liked covers for our forthcoming issue, illustrating a story for which the working title was "Why?". Could be that that will turn out to be just the right title, but we'll have to ponder the point a bit longer before deciding.

The poet's observation about plans of mice and men going oft astray seems particularly relevant to the recurrent question of when monthly publication will start. I'll have to beg off an answer for awhile, still; production difficulties are yet to be resolved.

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The Principle

by A. Bertram Chandler

People have talked about the innate perversity of inanimate objects for years . . . but has anyone tried to figure out whether there are any laws about it?

GORDON, whom beer always made philosophical, said that it was a great pity that Einstein was dead. Hibbert, whose favorite tipple, whiskey, made him argumentative, asked why.

"In any case," said Hibbert, not waiting for an answer, "he did quite enough damage for one man in his lifetime with that equation of his. You know the one I mean. . ."

"I do," said Gordon.

"You know the one I mean," repeated Hibbert, glaring at the other. "E over MC2. That's what gave them the idea for the atomic bomb. That's why we had no summer last year, and why we're not going to get any this. It's a great pity, in my opinion, that Einstein ever lived."

Gordon sipped his beer slowly. He was only a little man, and it seemed at first that he was almost afraid of Hibbert's bulk. But we knew that this was not the case. Philosophical he might be—but he was the sort of philosopher who would go on peddling his brand of philosophy in the face of any and all adverse criticism. He finished what was in his glass, then rapped it gently on the counter to attract the

A. Bertram Chandler is well known for his provoking little short stories about loopholes in science. Here's one which may make you wonder, why not?

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attention of the barmaid. When it was refilled he took a careful swallow, then drew up to his insignificant full height.

"THE TROUBLE with you, Hibbert," he said slowly and distinctly, "is that you just don't think. You take all your opinions ready-made from the newspapers—and from the cheapest and nastiest newspapers at that. To *you*, atomic power means nothing but bombs—fission bombs, fusion bombs, cobalt bombs and anything else that may have been cooked up since yesterday morning." He raised a hand. "Now, Hibbert, let me finish; we heard you out. My point is this—atomic power *had* to come. We are nearing the time when we shall have exhausted the oil and coal reserves—and, bear this in mind, ours is essentially a power-wasting civilisation. For example—just compare the consumption of power by the average household *now* with the same household's consumption twenty years ago. So—we just had to have this new power source and the sooner the better.. "

"So Einstein gave it to us," laughed Hibbert. "According to you, he's played his part."

"No, Hibbert; there was plenty of work yet to be done. Einstein never had a chance to finish his Unified Field Theory..."

"And what was that?" I asked.

"Mathematics—a formula—to account for every physical phenomenon. With those equations we could, perhaps, have drawn enough power from a grain of sand to light a city. We could have flown to the stars; we could..."

"...have blown the world up," finished Hibbert. "But cheer up Gordon boy, we'll do it yet. We'll do it that is, unless we really *want* to do it. And then Hibbert's Law will take over and stop us from doing it..."

"HIBBERT'S LAW? Never heard of it. Come to that—I've never heard of a scientist or a philosopher with your name."

"But you've heard of *me*," said Hibbert softly. "And you said just now that I couldn't think. Well, Gordon—I can think. I can think, for myself, too, and don't have to rely upon writers in the highbrow weeklies to supply my thoughts for me. Furthermore, Gordon, Hibbert's Law is just as valid as Einstein's famous equation; and, furthermore, I can prove it."

Gordon was on the point of saying something cutting. I knew what this might quite well mean. Hibbert—especially after a few whiskies—had a very nasty temper and I didn't want him to get us thrown out of the pub. It

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lacked at least twenty minutes to closing time. Accidently-on-purpose I shifted my weight from one foot to the other, jostling Gordon as I did so, spilling his beer.

Gordon, as he wiped down the front of his suit with his handkerchief, was not pleased. "You are a clumsy oaf, Whitley."

"But Whitley's not a clumsy oaf," almost shouted Hibbert. "He's just like all of us—a victim of the inexorable workings of Hibbert's Law..."

"Gordon's the victim," I said.

"Shut up, let me finish. One of the axioms of my Law is this: If any involuntary motion can possibly cause discomfort or inconvenience, it will do so."

"What *is* this drivel?" demanded Gordon.

"It's not drivel. It's a law of nature, just as valid as any ever formulated by Einstein, Newton, Archimedes or anybody else you care to mention. It's really amazing that nobody else has ever stumbled upon it—but then, the scientists and philosophers aren't, as a rule very practical people." He laid money on the wet counter, motioned to the barmaid to refill our three glasses. He raised his own. "Gentlemen, let us drink to Hibbert's Law, the Principle of General Cussedness!"

GORDON was beginning to get interested. "All right; you said you could prove it. Go on—prove it!"

"No trouble at all," laughed Hibbert. "Here's another axiom for you: When there are two or more similar keys on a key ring, you will always pick the one you need last!"

"It just *seems* that way," I started to say, but Gordon got in first.

"*You* might Hibbert, but *I* don't. I have to unlock when I get to work in the morning, and I have nine keys on the ring, all of them Yale type. The door that I usually open first has one little hole punched in the woodwork over the lock and there's one little notch filed on the key. And so on."

"The sort of thing *you* would do," said Hibbert disgustedly. "All right, here's another axiom. If you have an important appointment (or train to catch) and your watch or clock is wrong it is invariably slow."

"Any clocksmith could explain *that*," said Gordon.

Hibbert snorted; it was obvious that his stock of axioms was running low. "All right, here's another one. If you *insist* on doing a thing in the face of opposition, after two failures, the result of the third attempt is quite disastrous."

"Not a good one, Hibbert," I said, "not a good one at all. What about Robert Bruce and the spider? If at first

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you don't succeed, try, try again..."

"And what about Robert Clive?" asked Gordon. "When he was a mere clerk in the employ of the East India Company and tried to commit suicide, and the pistol kept on misfiring..."

"HOW MANY times did he try, anyhow?" demanded Hibbert. "If he *had* tried three times the third attempt would have blown his head off."

"Not necessarily. Maybe he *did* try three times—and it was the failure of the third attempt that convinced him that he was destined for great things..."

"So he went right out and conquered India," I said. "But was that a *good* thing, or a *disastrous* thing? A lot depends upon the viewpoint, you know. An ardent Indian Nationalist in the years before the war would have said that it was quite disastrous..."

"And *that*," almost shouted Hibbert, "justifies my Principle."

"Not necessarily," quibbled Gordon, looking over the tops of his spectacles in a most judicious manner. "As Whitley has pointed out, the disastrous results of Clive's third attempt at suicide—if he *did* try three times—are disastrous only when viewed in a certain, biased manner. Any unbiased observer would agree that Clive's conquest of India was a good thing. Meanwhile, we've heard a lot of nonsense about keys and clocks, and nonsense is all that is. I'm afraid, Hibbert, that you still have to convince us that the ruling spirit of the Universe is a mere, antic malice."

"There's your proof!" roared Hibbert, pointing. "'Ye that have eyes, but see not!'"

WE LOOKED to the corner where a game of darts was in progress. Both players were trying for the double one. Judging by their expressions they had been in the madhouse—that is, I believe, the expression used by darts players on such occasions—for some time.

"Look at them," said Hibbert. "Until they started to double out, they were putting the darts more or less—more rather than less—where they wanted them. Once they started to double out they just *had* to get down to the double one. And can they get it? Of course not; they're throwing double twenties that they would have been glad of when the game started..."

"Psychology," Gordon stated flatly. "Just psychology. They aren't really good players—in the early stages of the game they weren't quite able to put the darts where they

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wanted them. Quite often, when they were trying for the twenty, they must have got number one..."

"But that bears out Hibbert's Law," I said.

He ignored me. "It is only at this stage of the game that *real* urgency exists. Each knows that the other can end the game with one dart. Each knows, too, that it's almost closing time; and that unless the game is finished soon, the loser won't be able to buy the winner his drink—and one for himself, of course. It's a double urgency. And mixed up with it all is the Death Wish of the psychologists—after all, defeat is a little death, and so is failure to get a last drink before throwing out time..."

Just in time I paid for the last round.

RAISING his voice against the barmaid's "Time, gentlemen, *please*!" Hibbert said, "There's still one more proof. It's a mathematical one, and you can't argue with mathematics."

"Can't I?" demanded Gordon. "Well, all right, what is it?"

"We'll all walk together to Everdale Station," said Hibbert. "It's not putting anybody to any inconvenience. Whitley and I can both get trains from there, and you get your bus from there. We'll take a note of the registration numbers of every car we see..."

"Why?" asked Gordon.

"Did you ever play that game of Patience?" asked Hibbert. "It is a sort of Patience, although it's not played with cards. It's played with cars. You watch the number plates, and you see a number with 1 in it. All right. That's your 1. Sooner or later you see one with 2 in it. And 3. And so on. You get to the tens, and the twenties, and the thirties. But here's the point. You'll have been waiting a long time for, say, 13. And while you're waiting there'll be car after car with 12 and 14. Once you get your 13, however, there's no shortage of the number—it's the 14s that are in short supply..."

"Time, gentlemen, *please*," said the barmaid.

The lights started to go out.

IT WAS cold outside, and a thin drizzle was falling. The abrupt transition from the heated room to the chilliness outside made me realise that I was not quite sober—certainly not sober enough for the playing of mathematical games. I said as much, rather hoping that Gordon would decide to save himself time and a walk by catching his bus at the stop right outside the pub. Gordon, however, was just as determined to establish the fatuity of

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Hibbert's Law the so-called Principle of Cussedness, as Hibbert was to prove its validity.

For a few minutes, the three of us walked along the wet footpath, watching the passing cars. We had not long to wait for our first number—the second car we saw had 501 on its plate. 234 followed it.

Gordon laughed. "What price your theory, Hibbert? Three numbers that we want, all at once."

"Wait till we get to the tens," said Hibbert.

Five cars passed, all of which displayed either 1, 2, 3 or 4, before we got out 5. By this time I was beginning to get interested, and wondering how all this fitted in with the laws of random. But we got 6, 7, 8 and 9 without waiting too long; and then, almost at once, 10.

11 was a long time coming—and while we were waiting for it we got 123, 512, 712, 012 and 129. I could hear Gordon muttering, and knew that he was doing calculations in his head. When 11 came at last, it was an out-of-State car, with four numerals on its number plate—1112—giving us 11 and 12 simultaneously.

This, of course, pleased Gordon no end. "The Principle of Natural Cussedness," he scoffed. "In any case, Hibbert, you'd never prove anything by observations during a single evening..."

"I'VE BEEN doing this for a week, now," said Hibbert. "I got the idea from a magazine story—nothing to do with my Law, though—and I tried it out for my own amusement."

"A *week*," scoffed Gordon. "A week? My good man, don't you realise that you'd have to make your observations over at least a century before they had any value? For example—one night we might have a sequence of 1s, the numeral 1 at least once on every number plate. It'd be quite possible to have the same thing happening over an entire week. But, in the end, the number of 1s would even out to the right percentage."

"Not if you *wanted* them to," insisted Hibbert. "Meanwhile—hope you've realised that we're all wanting number 13 to turn up. And it's not turning up." He gestured towards a passing Renault. "Look—143—14!" He pointed at an approaching Morris. "120-12!"

"But this doesn't *prove* anything," protested Gordon.

"Yes, it does. We want number 13; according to the Laws of Random, we should have got it long before now. According to Hibbert's Law we should be getting the numbers we *did* want and the numbers we *will* want. And

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that's just what we *are* getting."

"And there's my bus," said Gordon.

The bus stop and the station were on the other side of the road. The traffic lights were against us, but there was a lull in traffic and Gordon, the bus service to whose suburb was not of the best, was determined to catch this one.

STILL ARGUING, we struck off across the road, against the lights. Gordon, I remember, was asking Hibbert if the alleged unluckiness of 13 had any bearing on his theory, or if his theory had any bearing upon the alleged unluckiness. Hibbert was indignant, and disassociated both himself and his precious Principle from supersition.

They didn't hear the horn of the approaching car. I did—I was walking to the right of the other two and caught Gordon's sleeve. Hibbert—still talking, still gesticulating, walked on. The driver of the car slammed on his brakes, hard—but it was too late. The road surface was greasy under the thin drizzle, and his tires were not new.

Hibbert screamed just once as the head of the car caught him. We ran to where he had been thrown—and when we reached him it was obvious, even to laymen like ourselves, that he was dead.

Yet, in a way, he lives on.

Gordon has become a convert to Hibbert's doctrines and plans, if he can find a publisher, to bring out a book expounding the Principle of Natural Cussedness. He claims that Hibbert's death—the number of the car that hit him was 014—was the one piece of proof that he, Gordon, needed.

Perhaps I'm old fashioned—but I still think that the license plate of that car should have had a 13 on it.

★

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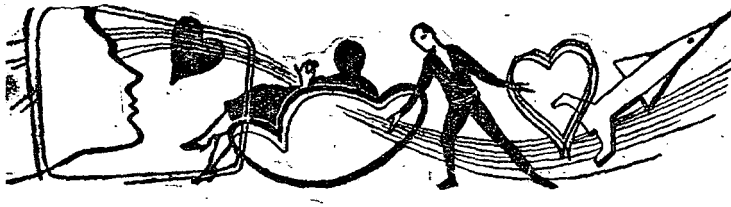

A Department For The
Science - Fictionist

INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION

Reports and Reminiscences

By Robert A. Madle

FASTER than light spaceships—in our generation? Fantastic as it may seem, United States Army Air Force research scientists are working in this area, and have actually contracted with industrial firms for further experimentation! In a recent news release, Dr. H. A. Wooster, of the Air Research and Development Command, announced that two methods of speed-of-light propulsion may soon be developed. (As a matter of fact, the first USAF report was picked up by the *Washington Daily News* as having already been "successfully developed.")

Dr. Wooster explained that these two methods have been named "Photon" and "Ionic Drive." Basically, Photon employs light itself as a reactor power and, in outer space, the force of a beam of light will push a ship at the same speed. However, the doctor explained, the Ionic Drive is the better of the two methods, inasmuch as the Drive can be controlled

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whereas the Photon method cannot. (The speed would remain constant with that of the "pushing" beam.) In utilizing the Ionic Drive principle, an electrical field is generated in which particles are moved faster and faster until finally released—pushing the ship. The speed of the ship could be controlled by the acceleration of the particles. Still required, said Dr. Wooster, will be a "space tug" to haul the ships up to a space station—from where they could take off—like a beam of light!

If the USAF isn't being premature with its publicity, we may well be on the verge of the accomplishment of the second of science fiction's most incredible concepts. The first, of course, was the unleashing of atomic energy.

While on the subject of the military, a lengthy article of definite interest to science fiction readers was featured in the November, 1956 issue of *Army* (published by the Association of the U. S. Army, 1529 18th Street, N. W., Washington 6, D. C., at 50¢ a copy). Lt. Col Robert B. Rigg, whose futuristic concepts have been mentioned in this department before, wrote and illustrated, "Soldier of the Futurarmy," a logically extrapolated article on warfare in the latter part of the 20th century. Replete with such concepts as flying platforms and flying tanks, as well as robot spies and gigantic supply helicopters, the article makes interesting reading.

THE LATEST of the flying saucer organizations, and one of the most impressive, is the National Investigations Committee on Aerial Phenomena, with headquarters in Washington, D. C. The board members include a nuclear physicist, a radio-television commentator, two ministers, a physics teacher, and a retired Rear Admiral. The membership stressed it is not just a group of science fiction fans. "We go beyond that," their spokesman said. T. Townsend Brown, who heads the organization and is a British expert on cosmic radiation, stated they had no preconceived notions about flying saucers. Service in the public interest is their only reason for existence.

And now comes the regular interplanetary release from Moscow. Scientist Yuri Slepkevich said that the Kremlin will soon send television-equipped rockets to Mars, Venus and the moon to transmit pictures back to Earth. The project is called, "Cosmic TV," and the first flights will be feasible between 1962 and 1967, when Venus will be in close juxtaposition to Earth.

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DURING the past two years the movie-makers have been capitalizing on science fiction monster pictures. The tide has not abated in the least. In fact, Mr. Scientifilm himself, Forrest J Ackerman, cautions us to watch for the following—"at your own risk": *Attack of the Crab Monsters, The Uranium Monsters, House of Monsters, The Green Eye, The Giant Ymir, Mark of the Claw, The Man Who Turned to Stone, The Man Who Destroyed the Earth, The Night the World Exploded, The Kraken, Queen of the Universe, They Lived A Million Years,* and *The Night Before the Day Science Fiction Fans Blew Their Top.* We suspect, with the latter title, Forry is pulling our tentacles—er—leg.

And we haven't heard the last of our old friends, Frankenstein and Dracula. England will be sending us a *Curse of Frankenstein,* while *Curse of Dracula* will be a domestic product. Forry Ackerman has written a screenplay called *Frankenstein from Space,* which is being developed by the Bankson and Jackson script team.

DAWN PRESS (Ken Krueger, 140 Harrison Street, Buffalo 10, New York) has been, for the past year or so, publishing inexpensive books of interest to the fantasy fan. For instance, their first entry into the field was a $1.00 reprint of Robert W. Chambers' scarce, *"The Maker of Moons."* This was followed by a collection of Arthur J. Burks off-trail yarns: *"Look Behind You,"* and a reprint of *"The Dream Quest of Unknown Kadath,"* by Lovecraft, the former at $1.00 and the latter at $1.25. They now announce the discovery of a story which many believed to be mythical and non-existent, *"The Moon Maker,"* by Arthur Train and Robert K. Wood. This is a sequel to the classic, *"The Man Who Rocked the Earth,"* and will be published in bookform at $1.00 *if the demand is sufficient.* Ken Krueger, an ardent fan and collector, deserves your support. Why not send for a sample of his publishing—at $1.00 per volume they are bargains indeed.

ARKHAM HOUSE, the first of the fantasy specialist publishers, announces its first release in quite some time —*"The Survivor & Others,"* by H. P Lovecraft and August W. Derleth The collection consists of seven stories begun or planned by HPL, completed by Derleth. The price is $3.00, and Arkham House is located

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in Sauk City, Wisconsin...

Dan Adkins, whose fanzine, *Sata,* has been reviewed enthusiastically in these columns, has made his first professional appearance—in *Other Worlds.* The rumor has it that at least one other prozine is attracted by his artistic talents... Harlan Ellison, former active fan and recently one of the most prolific of professional s-f writers, will have to subdue his prolificity somewhat. Uncle Sam's finger beckoned in Harlan's direction and he is now in the Army.

DONALD E. FORD informs us that the voting for America's representative to the London World Science Fiction Convention is becoming increasingly heavy. Don is Chairman of the Transatlantic Fan Fund (TAFF), an organization whose purpose is to bring foreign fans to American conventions and, when the situation is such that it can be done, send American fans to foreign countries. For instance, author-fan Ken Bulmer was brought over from London for the 1955 Clevention. This year one of eight nominees will represent American science fiction at the first *real* world convention. The fortunate individual will be chosen by the votes of science fiction enthusiasts. Those nominated for this distinct honor are: Forrest J. Ackerman, George Nims Raybin, Stuart Hoffman, Ed McNulty, Dick Ellington, Dick Eney, Boyd Raeburn, and Robert A. Madle. Write to Don Ford, Box 19-T. RR No. 2, Wards Corner Road, Loveland, Ohio, for information.

PLANS FOR the London World Science Fiction Convention, incidentally, are materializing rapidly. This, the first actual *world* convention, will be held early in September. Working very hard to make their first big affair a great success are such Britishers as Arthur C. Clarke, Eric Frank Russell, John Wyndham, Pamela & Ken Bulmer, Walter Willis, Peter Hamilton, and many others. More specific information concerning the program and allied activities will appear in this department next issue. In the meanwhile, why not send your $1.00 membership fee in today. For this slight sum you will be entitled to all membership rights in the World Science Fiction Society and will receive information brochures concerning the affair, as well as a copy of the program if you do not attend. Remember, even though you may not be able to actually be in London this September, you can be an integral part of the affair by supporting it with

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your $1. The address is 204 Wellmeadow Road, Catford, London, SE 6, England.

THE FAN PRESS

FANTASY TIMES: Some people, despite their well-meaning intentions, find, to their chagrin, that they are unable to find the time to read everything they desire to read —or, for that matter, everything they *buy* to read. If you are in that position, feel that you do not have sufficient time to read a great number of the fanzines, and yet would like to be aware of what's going on in the field, here is the answer. FT has been published for sixteen years (by James V. Taurasi and Ray Van Houten), and their regularity is nothing short of amazing. Concerned primarily with the professional s-f world, FT really keeps one abreast of the news. For instance, a recent issue sported these three headlines on its front page: "*Other Worlds* Changes Title & Goes Monthly"; "*S-F Adventures* and *Infinity* Go 6-Weekly"; "*Wonder Stories* Back As An Anthology". The headline of another issue brought a lump to our throat as we read, "F. Orlin Tremaine and Ray Cummings Dead." We think you'll like FT, and suggest you send 10c for a sample, or $1 for a dozen, to Fandom House, PO Box 2331, Paterson 23, New Jersey.

CONTACT: *What Fantasy Times* does for the professional world, *Contact* does for the fan world. This is a newsy bi-weekly featuring the latest concerning fans, clubs, conventions, and like that. A few sample headlines will indicate the type of material featured: "London Ahoy!" (all about the forthcoming Worldcon; "Richard Eney and Dick Ellington Taff Candidates for London"; "New York Fandom Disintegrates"; "Dutch Club Troubles". *Contact* is published in Holland, but can be obtained in the States from Dick Ellington, 98 Suffolk Street, Apt. 3-A, New York 2, New York. Send 10c for a sample, or $1 for a year (24 issues).

HYPHEN: Walter Willis, Ireland's first and leading fan, has been publishing *Hyphen* for quite a few years now. Walt is known in fandom for his varied talents: he is a collector and connoisseur, an s-f historian, a humorist and punster supreme, and, at times, he can even turn out a serious article on some phase of science fiction. Walt's bombastic personality exudes from his publication, a publication which, we are sorry to say, we have

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seen too few issues of. At any rate, the current issue contains forty odd pages—and in some cases they are odd—of s-f miscellania. The item we enjoyed most was Walt's little story, "A Way of Life," in which a Psychiatrist very thoroughly analyzes fans and fan mags. The Psychiatrist, based on his study of certain publications, comes to the conclusion that fandom is a form of sexual substitution. However, he is compelled to reappraise his diagnosis after reading several convention reports. This is really hilarious.

James Blish appears with a short-short, "My Life With the Cat People," which has a fetching—or should we say "retching"—plot. The boys at the office enjoyed this well-thought-out piece. And there are other interesting items, such as Eric Frank Russell's tale of the receipt of his "Hugo" which he was awarded at the New York Convention. 15c in stamps should get you a sample copy from 170 Upper Newtownards Road, Belfast, North Ireland.

All interested parties are urged to note our new address when sending fanzines, letters, inquiries, and the like: Robert A. Madle, 7720 Oxman Road, Palmer Park, Hyattsville, Maryland.

★

READIN' and WRITHIN'

BOOK REVIEWS by L. Sprague de camp

RICHARD GERBER: *Utopian Fantasy (A Study of English Utopian Fiction Since the End of the Nineteenth Century)*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1955, xii + 162 pp., 16s ($2.24).

This, like Penzoldt's *The Supernatural in Fiction* (which I reviewed in *Future Science Fiction* for August, 1954) is a treatise by a Swiss scholar on a branch of English-language imaginative fiction. Gerber is a professor of English at the University of Zurich. Despite the limitation of the title, the book tells a lot about pre-twentieth-century utopian writings, from Plato to Bellamy.

The book is, however, mainly concerned with about a

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hundred British utopian novels of the first half of the twentieth century. (At least one American writer, George R. Stewart, is included.) The lack of American works is no great fault, since during the first half of this period the British works in this genre were far ahead of the American in skill and solidity. The book is not so well-written as Penzoldt's, being expressed in a stiff, Latinized style full of words like "existential." and "concretion." On the other hand, its content seems sounder and more mature than that of Penzoldt's book. If you are a serious student of imaginative writing and not just a reader for pleasure, you should probably read this book.

Gerber discusses the rise of utopian humanism, the conflict between the arcadian and scientific versions of utopia, and the impact of Darwinian evolution on utopian writing. Utopias utilizing one of the mass-religions (usually Roman Catholicism) have been written but in general have been few and weak compared to those based on scientific materialism, humanistic rationalism, or pseudo-pagan primitivism. A common theme is the urbanization of the world, portrayed as either lovely or horrible. (With the world's population doubling every 52.4 years, this idea is no longer fantastic.)

Utopian writers have often grappled with the dilemma: to live better, people must be organized to produce more, and treat each other better; but if you organize them too much, you take away so much of their freedom that their lives are not better but worse.

Gerber devotes his last section to problems that face the utopian writer. For instance, should he use a "frame" in his story to convince the reader (the old lost-manuscript or covering-letter trick) or should he simply plunge right in? The latter approach is the modern one. How shall he depict a strange setting without getting bogged down in descriptive detail?

Where Gerber deals with imaginative fiction that looks forward, another book deals with imaginative fiction that looks back. This is Nathan Comfort Starr: *King Arthur Today (The Arthurian Legend in English and American Literature, 1901-1953)*, Gainesville, Fla.: Univ. of Florida Pr., 1954, xviii + 218 pp., $4.50 (paper, $3.50). Index.

This is a study of the use of the Arthurian cycle of legend in twentieth-century English language literature and verse. For those interested in such legendary it is essential, and thank goodness it is well written.

Professor Starr points out the great vitality of the cycle, which goes on inspiring imitations, adaptations, and pastiches—even in our unroman-

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tic age. A chapter discusses the intense Arthurian poems of Edward Arlington Robinson, *Merlin* and *Lancelot;* Masefield's amiably imaginative verse; and T. H. White's broad-viewed novel of Lancelot, *The Ill-Made Knight.* Another chapter deals with modern versions of the tale of Tristram and Isolt.

Another chapter tells of several modern novels that try to go back behind the anachronistic pageantry of Malory and Tennyson to rebuild fifth-century Britain as it really may have been, when the Saxons were overwhelming the little bickering post-Roman celtic kingdoms one by one, and a Romano-British general, leading the united armies of several of these kingdoms, made headway for a time against the invaders.

I am astonished that none of these writers nor, apparently, Professor Starr, thinks of an obvious explanation of the fragmentary histories of Gildas and Nennius. This is that there was only one such leader in fact, Aurelianus Ambrosius, and that the "Arthur" and "Merlin" of later writers are mythological doublets of this real general, to whom the names and attributes of Celtic gods like Arthur and Suibhne have been added. Arthur was a god of farming perhaps connected with the Gaulish Cernunnos.

The book came out too early to include Treece's *The Great Captains,* but Treece's book follows the general viewpoint and settings of Faraday's *P e n d r a g o n,* Frankland's *Bear of Britain,* and Duggan's *Conscience of the King.*

Another section tells of comic uses of the Arthurian legends, like Cabell's intellectual strip-tease *Jurgen,* and T. H. White's *Sword in the Stone.* The rest of the book deals with modern uses of Merlin, such as that of C. S. Lewis' unforgettable *That Hideous Strength,* and the mystical poetry of Charles Williams. Starr's admiration for Lewis and Williams is more wholehearted than mine, as their religiosity and anti-scientific bias don't seem to irk him as they do me.

Invaluable though the book is in its field, there are a couple of notable omissions. One is any consideration of the use of Arthurian themes in American science-fiction and fantasy, as published in the SF magazines. Thus nothing is said of Kuttner's excellent "Wet Magic," or "Kelvin Kent's" (Arthur Barnes') "Knight Must Fall," in which Pete Manx defeats Lancelot by slapping a piece of flypaper over the eye-slits of his helm.

Another omission is the two wide-screen colored movies, "Knights of the Round Table" and "Prince Valiant." The former was much better as photo-drama, but did not

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even try to compromise the millenial anachronisms of Malory. The armor, costumes, and customs are roughly those of the late fourteenth century, which is a little like having William the Conqueror win the Battle of Hastings with airplanes. "Prince Valiant" did make some effort to find a mean between the Malorian pageant and the real Dark-Age Britain, but it is questionable whether trying rationalize such a gorgeous piece of nonsense as the Arthurian cycle is worth while.

ONE NOVEL that Starr would have surely included had it come out sooner is by Henry Treece: *The Great Captains,* NY: Random House, 1956, xi + 302 pp.

The author says: "This is the story of 'King' Arthur, as I think it might have happened." It is a novelistic expansion, in a modern, realistic vein, of the brief paragraphs in Gildas and Nennius about the Saxon invasions of Britain and the resistance of the British under the general Aurelianus Ambrosius. The tale begins with Ambrosius, the last Roman Count of Britain, wandering around, old and nearly blind, after the last of his soldiers has fled. He is guided by one follower, the rascally young Medrodus or Medrawt (Mordred). They come to the pretty kingdom of Uther Pendragon. Here Uther's son, Artos the Bear (or Artorius Ursus Arthur) ranks Medrodus out of the succession to the Countship by a trick.

Artos is a fifth-century British Conan, a hulking, grunting, red-haired savage with tribal scars on his cheeks. He gathers a following, beats the Saxons again and brings a short time of peace and prosperity to Britain. He takes horrible revenges on those who wrong him, grows old, and at last is murdered.

Treece is convincing in his picture of the twilight of post-Roman Britain, and there is plenty of blood and thunder. Unfortunately, the leading characters are all such destestable people that it is hard to identify yourself with any. The story invites comparison with Alfred Duggan's *The Consicence of the King,* which also dealt with the Saxon invasions and brought in Ambrosius and Artorius. Though Treece's book is good, Duggan's was enlivened by the narrator's cynical humor, whereas the present work has no humor at all.

Still, Treece's tale is more readable by far than one that appeared a few months previously in the same genre: Edith Simon's *The Twelve Pictures* (NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1955, x + 367 pp.), a novel based on the medieval German epic poem, the *Nibelungenlied.* This epos tells

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about Siegfried, the son of a fifth-century king of the Netherlands; Gunther, king of Burgundy; Etzel, king of Burgundy; Etzel, king of the Huns; and Dietrich of Bern, king of the East Goths. (The last three are better known to history as Gundicar, Attila, and Theodoric.) The Scandinavian version of the same legend is the Icelandic *Voelsunga Saga*. This is the more archaic, as it keeps the Teutonic pagan gods, whereas *Die Nibelungenlied* has been Christianized. Wagner took the *Voelsunga Saga* as the basis for his *Ring* operas but gave the characters the German forms of their names: Wotan for Odin, Siegfried for Sigurd, Gunther for Gunnar, etc.

The Simon book is long and seems longer. Though good in picturing a colorful and bloody Dark-Age scene, it is so slow and heavy that I never finished it. It is one of those novels in which a whole chapter is devoted to the details of a childbirth.

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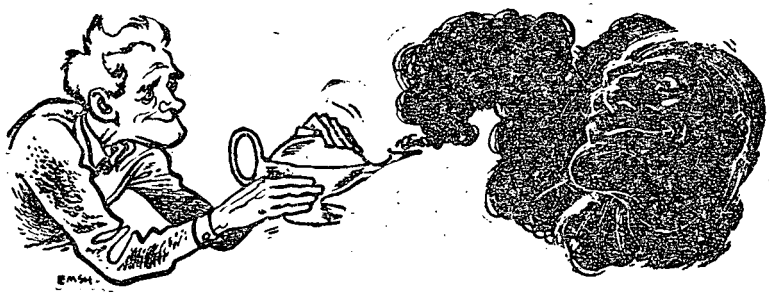

JUST RUB A LAMP...

by Theodore L. Thomas

illustrated by EMSH

What happens when some inventive genius tries to patent Aladdin's Lamp?

IT STARTED out to be just another hectic day at the United States Patent Office. The clerks in the Application Branch were all busy checking over the newly-arrived patent applications to make sure that everything was in order. Some checked the patent applications for omissions; others put the papers into jackets; others assigned serial numbers and filing dates to the complete applications; and others read the claims in each application in order that it could be assigned to the proper Examining Division. And right there for the first time an official of the Patent Office read the one claim in the patent application of Herkimer Treelimb.

The clerk read it and gulped and read it again. He snorted a loud laugh and said to his cronies, "Here's another one. This is the best we've had in years. Just listen to the claim in this application:

I claim:

The process of accomplishing anything one desires which comprises rubbing Aladdin's lamp, and demanding of the apparition thereby produced that said appari-

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tion accomplish anything one desires.

"Brother," continued the clerk, "there's a guy whose gears don't mesh anymore. I've seen some screwball patent applications in my time but this one is it. I'd better tell the chief." So he took the application in and showed it to the chief of the Application Branch.

The chief called the Solicitor's Office for advice, and the Solicitor, as always, knew just what to do. "You can take care of it easily," he said. "Treat it just like those patent applications on perpetual motion machines we're always getting. Send back the inventor's filing fee; point out that he is claiming the impossible; and tell him to forget it. Nothing to it." The Solicitor hung up.

Exacly one week later, the Patent Office received its answer from Mr. Herkimer Treelimb, inventor. The answer consisted of affidavits from the mayor, the chief of police, the fire chief, a minister, and a Federal judge, all saying that Mr. Herkimer Treelimb had demonstrated to their complete satisfaction that said Mr. Treelimb did indeed possess Aladdin's lamp, and that the lamp worked as described in the patent application. There was also a rather nasty letter from Mr. Treelimb himself demanding that his patent application be examined like anyone else's. Who did the Patent Office think it was, refusing to examine the application of a man who wanted to enjoy Aladdin's lamp exclusively and legally for seventeen years?

There was more in the letter, but the chief of the Application Branch didn't stop to read it. Instead he personally carried everything over to the Solicitor's Office and dumped it on the Solicitor's desk, "It's all yours. I'll have nothing more to do with it."

THE SOLICITOR glanced at the documents and immediately dispatched a law examiner to go to Mr. Treelimb's home in Maine to see for himself.

When the law examiner returned the next day, one look at his face was all the Solicitor needed. He picked up the phone and called the Commissioner of Patents and explained what had happened. There was a slight delay while the Commissioner asked a few questions and digested the answers.

The Commissioner decided it was too big for him, so he called the Secretary of Commerce. The Secretary *knew* it was too big for him so he called the President. The upshot of the series of phone calls was that an emergency meeting convened in the President's study the following morning. The entire cabi-

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net was there, and not one of them looked as though he were enjoying it.

The Commissioner of Patents explained the situation in greater detail to the distinguished assembled company. He pointed out that Mr. Treelimb's patent application was in proper form, and that unless the United States Government seized it, it would have to be examined in due course.

The Attorney General interrupted to explain in a lackluster voice that the Supreme Court would not look with favor on such a seizure—a little matter of the Fifth Amendment, deprivation of property without due process of law.

The Secretary of Defense loudly asked what would happen if Mr. Treelimb commanded his genii of the lamp to produce a hydrogen bomb and detonate it over some site for which Mr. Treelimb had no fondness.

The Attorney General related how several F. B. I. agents had questioned Mr. Treelimb yesterday along those very lines. Mr. Treelimb had explained that he only wanted the legal monopoly to which he was entitled under the U. S. patent laws. His wants were simple, and he was a peaceful man; he wanted to retire. Once the seventeen years had run their course, after he got his patent, he would turn everything over to the government. He didn't want anybody fooling around with his legal rights, so watch out or he'd sic that there genii on them; and here it is nine-thirty—don't you fellers ever go to bed?

The distinguished company sat in silence for quite a long time. One by one they shrugged their shoulders and looked at the President. It became painfully evident that—just as in the making of all other weighty and unpleasant decisions—the President was not going to get much help.

The President ticked off the various courses of action and the reasons why none were satisfactory. Furthermore as a practical matter, just how do you go about taking property away from a man who has a genii at his disposal? There was no good answer.

THE COMMISSIONER discussed and discarded the possibility of putting a Secrecy Order on Mr. Treelimb's application. Mr. Treelimb could so easily let the news get out without violating the letter of the law, however, that a Secrecy Order seemed useless. Besides Mr. Treelimb somehow was doing a good job of keeping the public from learning about the lamp.

The President asked how long it would normally take

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for Mr. Treelimb's patent to issue. The Commissioner of Patents guessed about three years. That gave them time to decide how to prepare the public when the time finally came for everybody to learn about Mr. Treelimb's unusual process.

And thus it was that the assembled dignitaries regretfully decided that the best thing to do was to do nothing, and hope for the best. The patent application was to be like any other application, processed and examined, just under the usual rules of secrecy that prevail in the Patent Office.

Now the Patent Office is overburdened with work; there are too many patent applications and too few Examiners. So it was just one year later that Mr. Herbert Hatton Patent Examiner Extraordinary, finally worked down to Mr. Treelimb's application.

Mr. Hatton had just finished writing an Office Action in a case. He sighed and pulled the topmost case from a huge pile of waiting applications on one corner of his desk. He noted the inventor's name—Treelimb—and then turned to read the single claim:

> The process of accomplishing anything one desires which comprises rubbing Aladdin's lamp, and demanding of the apparition thereby produced that said apparition accomplish anything one desires.

He read it again and then looked out the window for a moment. He shook his head, clucked sympathetically, and picked up the phone and dialed a number.

"Hello, Charley," he said, "This is Herb. Bridge tonight as usual? Good. Say, what I called about. I know you run a scientific library down there, but by any chance do you have a copy of *"Arabian Nights"*, or maybe it'll be listed under *"Thousand and One Nights"*? Yes. I'll wait."

"Oh, good, Charley. Look, find the story about Aladdin...Got it? Now find the part where he deliberately rubs the lamp to make old whats-his-name show up. Got it? Good. Read that to me, will you?"

As Charley read, Herbert Hatton ran his fingers along the claim in Mr. Treelimb's application. There was no doubt about it; the description that Charley read from the book matched the description in Mr. Treelimb's claim.

"Thanks, Charley," said Hatton. "Now what's the date of publication of that book? 1840? Fine. No, oh no, this isn't for my kids. I've got a patent application here where some fellow's trying to claim a process of rubbing Aladdin's lamp in order to accomplish

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something. The poor man doesn't seem to realize that before you can patent anything it has got to be new. This fellow is trying to claim a process that has been written up in books for at least one hundred years; I'm afraid he's just wasted his money and time. Well, thanks, Charley; we'll see you about eight. Bye."

Mr. Hatton marked the Treelimb application for Final Rejection and tossed it onto a small pile. He sighed and pulled the topmost case from a huge pile of waiting applications on one corner of his desk.

THE LAST WORD

Dear Editor:

Being an avid Savoyard and an equally avid SF fan, I have always thoroughly enjoyed the parodies on Gilbert and Sullivan which your magazines publish. In reading them over, I noticed that Isaac Asimov has been a frequent contributer towards making Gilbert spin in his grave. Having just written an analysis of Asimov's Future History, I decided to add a bit of impetus to the spin, in paying tribute to

A MODERN EPIC-TITAN

My favorite author, brilliant man,
A Future History began,
Resolved to make the whole work take
At least two dozen novels.
With mystery he filled each one,
All space cliches and BEM's he's shun,
Each tome the SF world did stun,
Now all of fandom grovels.
It grovels, it grovels,
Now all of fandom grovels.

And I am sure you will agree
His plan was right in n'th degree.
And he was right, and we are right!
Long live the Future History!
And he was right, and we are right!
Long live the Brilliant Future History!

The first book written, as you'd hope
Is at the start of this great op-
Us, though the second must be reckoned
Three books past the middle.
But all who say that makes no sense
Are low-brow, ignorant, and dense!
His work's inspired and most immense—
To nothing second fiddle!
First Fiddle! First Fiddle!
To *nothing* Second Fiddle!

And you will say, as I expect,

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Such work is free from all defect.
And you are right, and I am right,
And everything is quite correct.
And you are right, and I am right,
Genius like this is easy to detect.

But with still more than half to write,
He did something that's just not right—
His third big book was what we took
To lead us to a climax.
And then he said the tale would end,
Beyond it, he would not extend,
From there, reversed, his tracks he'd bend
And fill in all the time-cracks.
The time-cracks? The time-cracks!
He'd plaster up the time-cracks.

Now this is wrong, I think you'll say,
To treat his fans this sort of way.
It is not right, *he* is not right,
There should be *one* more, anyway!
You are not right, it is not right,
Empire-ically, go on, *Herr Doktor* A.!
Go on, go on, Foundationallay!

BRUCE PELZ, Box 3255, Univ. Sta.,
Gainesville, Fla.

We sent your offering on to Dr. Asimov, Bruce, not being expert on Gilbertian forms, and he suggested the few minor changes which you'll notice. He notes, by the way, "It's very flattering, of course, and what with my diffidence and modesty, it's only my sterling sense of duty that keeps me from dying of embarrassment." This upon my request to check the Gilbert canon on your metre and rhyme scheme.

EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL LAND TITLES

Dear Mr. Lowndes:

I never read a new magazine without sending a comment in to the Editors and publishers.

I liked all the stories in your magazine. They are above all, clean. I just finished reading a rival magazine which does not measure up to such standards, and I lost no time in telling the publisher about it.

I would like to comment in a rather untrained way, about the stories and which ones I liked best, and why.

"Salt Lake Skirmish" I rate as a very good story with an ability to sustain the interest right down to the finish. It is well written. I was afraid, though, that the hero "I" didn't like it up around the Utah country, but everything turned out all right.

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"Saturnalia" is quite all right except for one technical error. My encyclopedia states that there is very little difference in the gravity pull of Saturn and that of Earth. It has a greater mass but lower density. I haven't figured it out, but the author probably is off in his figures concerning the speed of the satellite ship. I would say offhand that they are quite a bit too high, considering the ship's distance from the center of the gravitional mass. Another point, the ship is orbiting within the rings and therefore must pass thru them periodically in its rotation around the planet. Isn't that dangerous?

"The Quest" is a nice little story. Nothing unusual but entertaining anyhow. "Galactic Gamble" is definite proof that a bunch of monkeys will eventually play Bethooven's *Ninth Symphony* if enough of them pound long enough on enough pianos.

"Dark of the Moon" puts a new idea altogether on the concepts of space travel. The author may be absolutely right about it, too. For one, I would be willing to give him a vote of confidence. It is a good original idea.

"To Have and To Hold Not" rates tops with me. There you may have a human interest story that may well come true sooner than we think.

"Tempus Non Fugit": well written and entertaining. Fulfills most of the requirements of my kind of reading.

And then last but by not any means least, there are the two Departments—or rather features—by L. Sprague de Camp. Entertaining and educational. Keep them up.

I must admit that I have only sketchily read the Editorial but it conveys a message that every author of Science Fiction should read and study. I have read so called Science Fiction stories where the so-called technical jargon was away over my head, and I'm not speaking of such simple gadgets as hyper-space drives, space warp, matter attenuators and so forth.

Neither is it difficult to digest such terms as "Galactic Federation" "Galactic Patrol" etc. I have always presumed that anyone who read Science Fiction had at least a basic knowledge of the various sciences involved in such stories. What I refer to is a psuedo-technical language attempting to describe something that never could possibly exist, and no one would want to it to, even if it could. You know what I am trying to say. I admit I got in a little bit of deep water. Your magazine is all right, and you notice that I didn't call it a "mag". I believe that the term "mag" for magazine is the first indication of losing

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its appeal to the reader. There may be sections of the country where this term is common, but in certain Science Fiction magazines is the only place where I have ran across the term. It may be used in Westerns too, I don't know, I never read them. If I have to read fiction, I want it to be something substantial and good, and I do admit that quite often I come across an amazingly new concept in the Science Fiction variety of stories. I feel that it won't be long before my abilities along inventive lines will reach the point where the anti-gravity principle will be child's play.

I have often wondered why we couldn't develop a principle of sending messages thru space by using an already existing light beam (or any other suitable beam or ray) as our medium or conductor for some sort of a super-imposed impulse. This might be carried on beyond this first step, superimposing more impulses on impulses already superimposed, etc., until the desired speed of transmission was attained. Such a system would have no practical purposes within the confines of terrestrial communication but would be a real necessity when dealing with the transmission of messages from point to point within our galaxy or to other galaxies. Our medium or conductor already exists with beams of light and other rays going in every conceivable d i r e c t i o n. It would take some time however to build up further than the first step. Maybe this principle has already been used in fiction. I have never seen it if it has. I have read countless stories where the method of communication was instantaneous, but no explanation was given as to how such a speed was accomplished.

I wonder how long it will be before some author comes out with a story based on extra-terrestrial land titles. I understand that right now there is a man either in New York or nearby who has been selling lots on the moon for quite a while. It would be my humble opinion that such titles are not valid, but in the event that the moon is ever used by any company as a base station or other purposes, such spurious owners of lots would have to be gently ousted out by the simple expedient of a quiet title suit at law. The procedure of such quiet title suits would be simple. Actual title to any land must be won in the first place by discovery or conquest before it can be transferred to another person. No man can rightfully say that he discovered the moon, or any part thereof, neither has any man conquered any part of it except in fiction. Therefore any so called titles to the moon or any part thereof are purely fictional and have as much bearing in law as a Buck Rogers Comic Book would have in establishing

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the authenticity of the Encyclopedia Britannica.

CHESTER MILBOURN, Estancia, New Mexico

We'll let the author of "Saturnalia" defend himself on your point about the speed of the satellite ship.

GARRETT REPLYING TO MILBOURN

Dear RAWL:

Mr. Milbourn is the kind of fan I wish we had more of these days; a few years ago, if an author made a slip in his science, he could depend upon a dozen letters from irate fans, who wouldn't let him get away with it. Today, most fans don't seem to care.

Mr. Milbourn cares, even if his own science is a little shaky.

First, some figures: Saturn has a mass 95 times that of Earth, and an equatorial radius 9.5 times as great. Now, if Saturn were the same size as Earth, the surface gravity would be 95 *g*. But the distance from Saturn's center is 9.5 times as great, so, since the pull is inversely proportional to the square of the distance, the surface gravity of Saturn is nearly the same as that of Earth's. (Actually, it's 1.17 times as much, but let's not quibble.'

The difference is one of gravitational gradient. If we were in a spaceship, 3950 miles above Earth, we would be 7900 miles from the center, or twice as far away as we are at the surface. The pull will be $(1/2)^2$ or $1/4$ as great. In order to get to a point above Saturn where the pull is $1/4$ *g*, we would have to be 37,550 miles above it! The Saturn Survey Station, as I said in paragraph one, was only 3,000 miles from the surface.

As to passing through the rings, it most certainly would be dangerous. But I said that the station was *"nearly eleven thousand miles within the ring itself."* The inner diameter of the ring is 102,000 miles, which places it 13,500 miles from the surface. The Station, 3,000 miles from the surface, was much nearer the planet than the ring. See?

RANDALL GARRETT

AS OTHERS SEE US

Dear Bob:

Among other things in your March number, I've noticed that yet another of your readers has taken the trouble to dissect with unloving care

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one or more of the recent remarks made by yours truly in print. Evidently, Mary Holden is living in a community for which we fans have long been searching: a place in which science fiction is the rule, rather than the exception. How else can one explain her statement: "Almost every person I encounter has some interest in science fiction, and a few are violent fanatics. None—I repeat, *none*—have expressed to me an opinion like that which Mr. Moomaw ascribes to Mr. Barrow."

Well, in the first place, you won't learn anything of public opinion if you don't seek it out. Even in this unfriendly town, no one walks up to me out of the clear blue smog and begins buffetting me about the head and shoulders upon seeing the latest issue of SFS, or any of the other prozines, under my arm. That would be the other extreme. I have a suggestion for you, though, Mary: the next time you find yourself before the stf shelf of a library or bookstore, pull out a copy of any book there, and turn to the nearest mundane browser. If you must, introduce yourself, then quietly ask what this person thinks of the book, not even bothering to mention that it is stf, and assuming that said person has read it already. (He probably hasn't, which makes this bit all the more effective.) Now stand back. If the person you've picked is anything like 75% of the people I've come across, you can expect anything from a savage "Who reads that crap?" to a thirty-minute discourse on the evils of fantasy in the younger generation.

After you've done something along these general lines, and sought public opinion over a period of time among people who are not your best friends (and so would not give their honest opinion for fear of offending you), come back and tell me about it. I'd almost be willing to bet there'll be a change of heart in evidence.

I know how people who aren't members of organized fandom hate to hear this, but technically, Mary, you *aren't* a member of the beanie faction. You're a science fiction reader, but so far as I know, not an active fan. This doesn't make much difference in the expression of your opinions, of course; but if you were, it might make a sizeable difference in the attitude people take toward your chosen avocation. Why not try it and see?

So much for that. The outstanding feature in the entire issue, as far as I'm concerned, was the half-page devoted to "Next Time Around"...and to the announcement that SFS is finally going monthly. That's a bit of news I've awaited for well over a year. As for serials, I personally regard them as a sort of ic-

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ing on the cake; the more frequent schedule is the important thing. All of the professional magazines in the field seem to be enjoying their most prosperous period since the "boom" years of 1952, indicating that we're headed for another such hectic peak. My only hope, that this time the prosperity doesn't become stretched too far, as it was last time, resulting in the rock-bottom depression of 1953-55. If we (I speak collectively of everyone in the business, fans, readers, writers, editors, and publishers) can resist the temptation of overexpansion, of money-happy mainstreamers who know only as much about stf as their Sunday funnies tell them, and any number of other factors; if we level off at the very crest of the wave instead of waiting until it's too late, when we're on the roller coaster rocketing down the other side of the sales graph, perhaps it will be possible to turn the "boom" into permanent high living. If not, well...you know as well as I do.

The best (or at least the most moving) story included this time is Bryce Walton's "Dark Of The Moon", an excellent emotional mood piece. There is an atmosphere running throughout, a sort of subdued, almost underplayed, feeling that conveyed the feelings of the protagonist (and presumably Walton himself) far more intensely than a rousing adventurous version possibly could have. Of the remainder, only "Tempus Non Fugit" by Gordon Dickson remains outstanding in my mind, due to the delicious humor that the author included.

Only one question before I go: who is hiding behind the pseudonym of Richard Roy-

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ale? The style is so familiar that it's obscuring my powers of recall; how about it, so I can get some sleep, eh? Is it Garrett?

KENT MOOMAW, 6705 Bramble Ave., Cincinnati 24, Ohio

I must confess that I've never dared to make that test myself. ... Richard Royale isn't Randall Garrett; however, you might be more familiar with him under another name.

THOUGHT

Dear RAWL:

The May *Science Fiction Stories* is at hand and read. In the fashion of the overly-enthusiastic young neo, I'd like to make a few comments, to wit:

You've fallen into a rut. An interesting and profitable one, admittedly, but still a rut. I recall only a very few of the stories that have appeared in the past two years. In fact, none stands out more clearly than that delightful bit of (Dick's?) in the first annual issue, anent the invaders of Earth.

Your writing is always competent, even though occasionally confusing to one who reads fiction solely for relaxation. Silverberg, under any name he may choose (he must have a dozen or so by now) is enjoyable, but just beginning to sow his oats. The current offering, "Sunrise on Mercury" is completely stock, both in ideas and characterization. Emsh did a nice cover for this one, but I can't help think what Bonestell would have done with the same subject, even if Bonestell can't draw a decent human figure.

Thomas N. Scortia: a man I would like to meet, for from his writings, I gather the impression that he has a fascinating imagination. But I dislike his style intensely. "Fulfillment" left me totally cold, trying to draw the story together. Actually, it gave me the impression of a lazy man's novelet or novel. 5,000 words simply does not give full enough scope to the plot. Alien creatures fascinate me, especially when done by Eric Frank Russell or Hal Clement (how about straining the budget for something by those two?)

A. Bertram Chandler was completely disappointing How stock can you get? The basic theme was handled for all time by van Vogt many years back, although I no longer recall the title of the story.

"The Innocent's Refuge", "The Janus City" and "Hunting Machine"; I read them all—last night, as it happened—so I still have some

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recall of their content. But I'm sure that a week from now they will have slipped into the morass of thousands of similarly-undistinguished stories that I have plowed through since becoming a fan.

"The Demancipator" and "Pleasure Orbit" are tales that rated about equal in the issue. I like humor, particularly when treated as tongue-in-cheekish as in these two tales. Personal favorite is the latter; Marks is good! So why don't I remember any of the other thirty or forty stories he's had printed in the last few years?

Which leaves only one story to comment on. Mr. Lowndes, sir, I shall personally horsewhip you! You have commited the one unforgiveable sin in a magazine such as this. You have made me think! Think, sir! Cogitate deeply. With a magazine I read strictly for enjoyment!

John Campbell, of course, is the leader of the current psi-kick in Stf. The April *Astounding* came through the mail today, with a Poul Anderson bit that seemed to me to be very similar to Winterbotham's tale, even as to length of development. Of course, R. R. is purely speculating, and the chances that the technique dwells on actually exists is on odds somewhat astronomical. But it is an answer that fits the questions—all of them. And that seems to answer a personal experience.

One time I participated in an experiment in telepathy. This was about three years ago, while I was still in the Air Force, and took place in San Antonio. My partners in the experiment were a young civilian, aged 19, and his sister-in-law, a year older. The three of us were all within a two-year span in age, and possessed many similar characteristics, including a burning curiosity.

We attempted to pass thoughts from one mind to another, and in this we totally failed, after struggling for the best part of two hours. We took a coffee break and tossed the subject around.

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Someone—I no longer recall who—suggested that we were biting off more than we could chew, thoughts being (or so we assumed) extremely complex items.

So we concentrated on something more simple. For our first try, we chose color impressions. During the next two hours we ran about fifty test, varying as sender and receiver. As sender, the girl, Betty, was the most successful; as receiver, I. Out of thirty tries, I hit about 20 right.

One of the first things we learned was that personal contact was totally necessary. Second fact was that only the primary colors seemed to be transmittable, most successfully red and blue. We worked in a dimly-lighted room, and tried about half of the experiments with our eyes closed, and half with them open. Again, we were most successful with them shut.

The impressions usually came first as faint threads, that suddenly blossomed into bright splashes, only to vanish a moment later.

Later we spent another hour attempting to transmit emotional feelings, but all that ever developed were faint feelings of either well-being or disturbance. Only once in the evening did anyone manage to transmit an image, I being the sender, and concentrating on a mental image of my mother. The girl got an impression of an elderly gray-haired lady, but nothing more.

Did our experiments prove anything? No. But they succeeded in proving to us that the mind has some powers. What kind of tie-in they have to the physical world, or, for that matter, the supernatural world, we could not say; and we defy anyone else to say. But there is something: what, I want to know. I hope I'm still around when the secrets of the mind are finally uncovered. Maybe it will happen in space and maybe not. But there is no subject more fascinating.

BOB HOSKINS, Box 158
Lyons Falls, N. Y.

We like to run stories which we fondly imagine will make the readers think—but there's no telling which story will fulfill this end, or in what way, with any particular reader. So, whatever our own opinion may be, it's always gratifying to find that a particular tale actually did it—even if it's a bit of a wrench to find that the ones in the same issue which we thought might have that effect just didn't take. Hope your feeling about the other stories was just something related to this issue, and isn't a recurrent thing, with every issue of SFS. Let us know, won't you?

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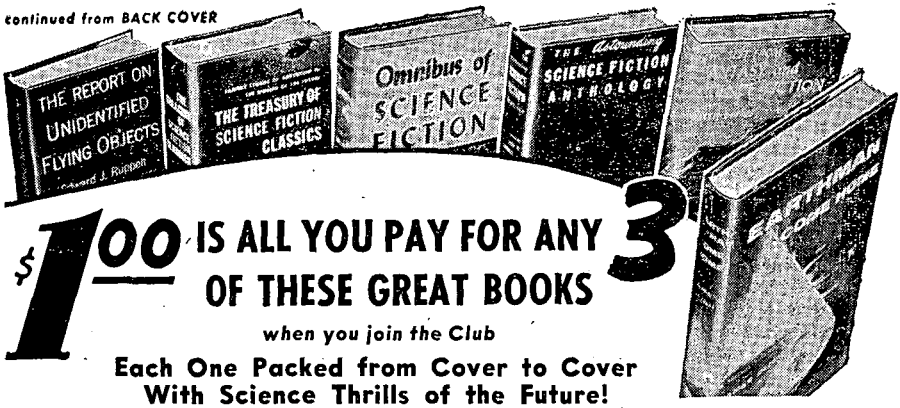
continued from BACK COVER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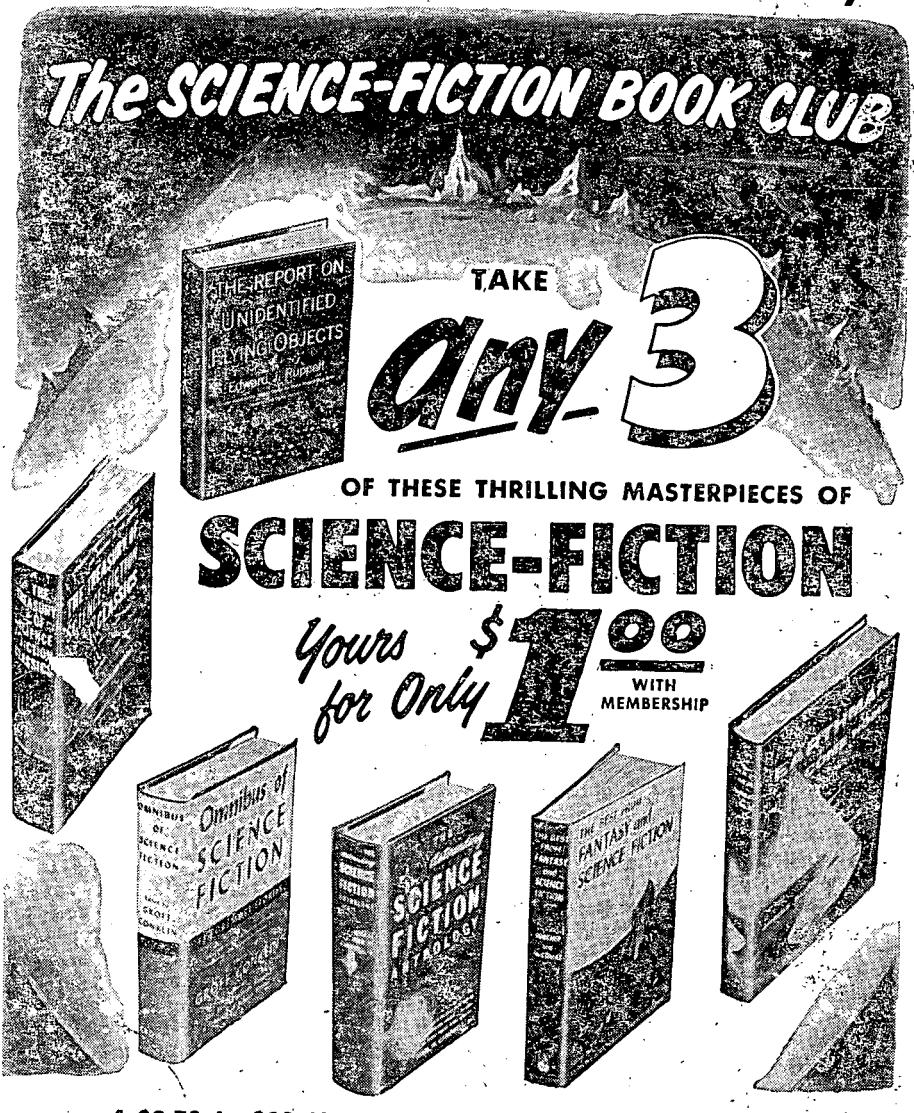
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